

Disclaimer: Obviously, I do not own Harry Potter. If I did, I would be vacationing somewhere warm, rather than shivering in a chilly classroom thinking up Fanfiction.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the afore-mentioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

Chapter One

It had all started when Dudley and Roisin Dursley, of Number Four, Privet Drive, had been settling down for their pre-dinner nap.

Listening to the classical dance music that their mother often played to get them to sleep, Roisin had been awoken rather sharply when two of the dolls that slept in the crib with her had started waltzing, prompting a loud wail from her brother.

Her 19-month-old mind unable to comprehend the term 'impossible', Roisin really didn't know what all the fuss was about, but the end result had been Dudley throwing her dolls out the window and screaming for Mummy.

Roisin's 19-month-old mind was able to comprehend the opinion that, honestly, her brother was taking things way out of proportion. Mummy had thought that it was just a half-asleep dream from the limitless mind of an infant, but it hadn't stopped her from fussing over Dudley for the rest of the afternoon and evening, mostly ignoring Roisin.

Roisin had sulked about this for a while, but her mind was too young to focus on anything for a long amount of time, so she had eventually become bored with sulking.

Letting Dudley be fussed over, Roisin occupied herself by curling up in a corner, looking through her picture books and playing with her dolls, seeing if any of the others would dance as well.

Sadly, they wouldn't, and the novelty of this activity eventually wore off, and Roisin's eyes began to wander for something else to do.

Mummy fed them slowly that night, largely because of Dudley testing out a new word (shan't) and refusing to eat, and then Daddy was home.

Daddy had read her a book, and then taken her upstairs to join Dudley in sleep while Mummy made tea.

Aside from the dolls, it had been a normal day at the Dursley residence.

Roisin had always been the type of child who slept lightly, but seldom woke during the night.

Tonight was the exception. The sound of a motorbike engine was heard once in a blue moon around Privet Drive, so it was understandable that the noise would rouse Roisin's curiosity, despite the hour.

With her cot next to the window, Roisin could easily see the unusual gathering of an old man with a very strange beard (Daddy would throw a fit if he saw the length of it!), a cat who turned into a woman and back again, and a huge man on the motorcycle who left something on the doorstep.

Roisin puzzled over this momentarily, and then dismissed it. After all, many things that grown-ups did were silly, in her eyes.

Eventually, the strange gathering separated and left, and things returned to normal.

Normality would be shattered the next day, however, with Petunia Dursley's ear-splitting scream, and the unwanted arrival of her cousin, Harry Potter.

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OK, Prologue is done. What did people think? Reviews are appreciated, Flames are laughed at, and anyone interested in playing beta can contact me at the e-mail in my profile.

Thanks for reading,

Nat.

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Chapter One

March 22nd, 1985

It had been a little under three and a half years since Harry Potter had arrived at the Dursley's, and he was currently sitting in a corner as his cousins celebrated their 5th birthday.

Or rather, Harry was watching Dudley bask in his parent's attention, while Roisin avoided Aunt Marge and either sat with her best friend, noses buried in a book, or played with Grandma Fionna.

Harry liked Grandma Fionna, even if they weren't strictly related. She always had a kind word for him, and would often slip him a treat when his Aunt and Uncle weren't looking.

Looking back at his cousins, Harry once again marveled at the differences. Dudley was blond and very plump, with piggy blue eyes and a pink face. In startling contrast, Roisin had black hair and calm grey eyes, her build tall and slim. Actually, Harry himself was mistaken for Roisin's brother far more often than Dudley was.

Harry was certainly a lot closer to Roisin than she was to any of the other Dursleys. Roisin was largely indifferent to the fact that he was not her brother and that the rest of her family preferred to ignore his existence. Roisin had settled for a happy medium, treating him with the affectionate disinterest that all children have for younger relations. She also never went wild whenever something unexplainable happened around him.

Of course, this last fact could have been because Roisin had made a few strange things happen herself. Funnily enough, Vernon and Petunia never seemed to notice, (or blamed it on Harry) even when

the colour of Roisin's room changed from nauseating shades of pink to softer shades of dark and light blue.

July 31st, 1985...

Harry's small face lit up in delight as his Uncle Vernon handed him a brightly wrapped package.

Beaming, he tore it open. Inside lay a small black spatula. He looked at his Aunt and Uncle, confusion clear on his face. "What is it?"

Uncle Vernon's eyes narrowed. "You use it to cook, boy. It's time that you started earning your keep, so get to the kitchen and start making breakfast!"

Harry's face fell. Roisin shot a sympathetic, but discreet look at her cousin, and an un-noticed reproachful one at her father. Following Dudley's frequent example, she grabbed the spatula and ran up to her mother. "Why does Harry get one and I don't? Teach me, Mummy, I want to learn!"

The look of chagrin on his relatives' faces was the high-light of Harry's day.

December, 1986...

Harry slowly walked home from school, an arm around his crying cousin. He was a boy, and boys didn't cry, but he could easily see where Roisin was coming from.

He knew, without a doubt, that they were both in for trouble when they got back home.

Harry had somehow turned his teacher's wig blue, and just knew that he was headed for a week in the cupboard as soon as the Dursleys found out.

Roisin, on the other hand, had managed to throw a paint-pot from a table onto another student's head – while on the other side of the room.

Even the Dursley's amazing powers of denial and selective memory was going to have a hard time explaining that away.

Later...

Roisin wore a pensive frown as she headed upstairs, "accidentally" dropping a burrito wrap within reach of the cupboard under the stairs.

There had been mixed reactions to the news that Harry and Roisin had brought home. Grandma Fionna was visiting, and looked absolutely delighted when Roisin had taken a detour to tell her about it. She had hugged her grand-daughter and promised that every thing would be all right.

Her parents, on the other hand, had been shocked and horrified at the news of what had happened at school. Her father had looked like he was actually going to explode before her mother had intervened.

Asking her mother why had produced a shrug and "You're my daughter. That's enough."

"Enough" hadn't stopped Petunia from acting very stiff and formal toward her daughter ever since the news, however.

Walking up to her parent's room to say goodnight, Roisin saw her father entering, and for a moment their eyes met.

Then Vernon looked away and very deliberately shut the door behind him.

The mind of a child is an amazing thing. Sitting in her room after her father's abrupt dismissal, Roisin had looked over previous incidents and decided that they had all happened at times of very high emotion. She would just have to have better control over herself, and make sure that nothing else happened where her parents or various authority figures would notice.

Then maybe her parents would love her again.

Things eventually started to come to a head on Roisin and Dudley's eleventh birthday.

Except for a letter for Roisin (which Dudley had tripped and dropped in the fire, then blamed Harry), the day had progressed normally, with money and presents for the twins, Dudley whining about there being less presents than last year and an excellent breakfast. Harry may have resented being made to cook, but it was Roisin's birthday, and she usually tried to do something nice on his.

The day started to go downhill when Arabella Figg called to say that she had broken her leg and couldn't take Harry for the day while the Dursleys went out to celebrate.

Dudley had instantly thrown a tantrum, wailing to try and get sympathy from their parents, much to Roisin's exasperation. She wasn't above using the same trick herself when necessary, but she was at least realistic about it. How nobody noticed that Dudley was faking, Roisin had no idea.

Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, Dudley's friend Piers Polkiss and Roisin's friend Lorna turned up before the Dursleys could find an acceptable solution.

So, for the first time, Harry found himself accompanying the Dursleys on an outing, albeit with a standing cupboard-threat if anything funny were to happen.

Their time at the zoo was enjoyable, and went by with no strange incidents (unless one counted Dudley's occasional tantrum, but that was routine) until they reached the reptile house.

Roisin and Lorna were comparing an Australian Black Snake to a desert viper when they heard Piers yelling, and spun around just in time to see the glass in the Boa Constrictor case suddenly disappearing and the snake taking the opportunity to escape, gliding past a shocked Harry and out the door, snapping at Piers and Dudley's heels as it slithered past.

The trip ended rather quickly after that.

The five children were rushed out of the zoo, with Piers and Dudley insisting the whole way that they had nearly been killed, while Roisin

rolled her eyes at the dramatics. Dudley really needed to stop being such a drama-king.

Unfortunately for all concerned, Piers managed to calm down enough to say that Harry had been talking to the Boa Constrictor. Roisin shared a pained wince with her cousin, and then went back to being amused at her brother's discomfort.

It was the Summer Holidays by the time Harry's punishment was let up, and all three children were filled with both anticipation and apprehension at the thought of starting different schools. Roisin would be attending a girl's Grammar School that both Petunia and her maternal grandmother had attended. Dudley was destined for Vernon's Alma Mater, Smeltings, and Harry was going to the local comprehensive, Stonewall High.

As with all new schools, there had been a fuss about the uniforms. Roisin had complained that her new uniform looked like something out of a convent or the Victorian Era, but then saw what Harry and Dudley would be wearing, and shut up.

Harry's uniform was nothing more than some of Dudley's old clothing, tie-dyed grey.

Dudley's uniform of a maroon tailcoat, orange knickerbockers and a flat straw boater had sent Roisin dashing to her room and laughing herself sick.

Then, not long before Harry's birthday, everything went to hell in a hand basket.

It had started when Harry was sent to get the mail after a short argument with Dudley, and returned with two parchment letters that sent Vernon's face through a very interesting cycle of colours before he threw the children out of the room. Dudley and Harry promptly had a furious but silent fight over who listened at the key-hole. Roisin ignored them and got there first, listening to her parents in a panicked discussion that may as well have been spoken in Greek for all the sense it made. Something about 'not having one in the house' and 'might be watching'.

Things didn't stop there, however. Harry was moved out of the cupboard and into the hastily converted study, but the letters kept coming.

On Wednesday, Dudley was made to get the post, and again returned with two letters. There was a race to get into the hall and at the letters. Vernon had to wrestle with Dudley to get the letters, made considerably harder by Harry and Roisin swinging from his neck. Everyone got hit a lot by the Smeltings Stick, but Vernon emerged victorious, if very winded, and that was the end of those letters.

On Thursday, Vernon slept at the front door to prevent anyone sneaking down for early mail. Roisin had anticipated this and let Harry or her brother take the risk. If they succeeded, she would retrieve hers later. If they failed, she would not get the blame. The rest of the family was back to being stiff and formal with her as it was.

More letters arrived, and Vernon nailed the mail-slot shut.

On Friday, it became apparent that who-ever these people were, they were serious. No fewer than twelve letters arrived, obviously not caring that the letter-box had been nailed shut. The letters were pushed under the door, through the side, and even through the small window in the downstairs bathroom that nobody used.

Vernon nailed all of those shut, too, and started jumping at small noises. Roisin made as many small noises as possible, hoping to make him nervous enough that he would give her the next letter, just to make her stop.

On Saturday, twenty-four letters arrived, rolled up inside each of the two dozen eggs that a very confused milk-man had slid to Petunia through the living-room window. Petunia had let out another of her ear-splitting screams at the discovery, and Vernon had made furious calls to the dairy, the post office and anywhere else that he could think of, trying to find someone to complain to.

They were sitting down to breakfast on Sunday, Roisin trying not to point out that her father was spreading marmalade on the newspaper, when a multitude of letters came streaming down the chimney.

Roisin dived to the floor, managing to grab a letter as she rolled under the table. From the corner of her eye, she saw Harry leaping in the air for one, only to be grabbed by her father and thrown out of the room. Roisin quickly stuffed the letter down the side of her skirt, made sure it was covered by her shirt, and followed the rest of her family, deciding to read the letter at a later point, when she had some privacy. Privacy, however, would be a long time in coming.

Vernon was in a full-blown panic, packing everyone's bags, hustling them all into the car. Roisin really wished that the new company car had been something sensible, like a Toyota, rather than a sports car, as they took off at high speed.

Every so often, Vernon would double back for several miles, before resuming the previous route. Other times, he would drive into a large field in the middle of nowhere, get out and look around, then get back in and continue driving.

Roisin was beginning to have serious concerns for her father's mental health.

Roisin's chance to read the letter came when they eventually stopped for the night at a seedy motel next to a railroad.

Vernon had insisted that no-one go anywhere alone, even visiting the communal bathrooms in pairs. Roisin simply grabbed Harry and the letter and headed for the bathroom.

Standing next to the wash basins, the two examined the letter. It was made of heavy yellow parchment, with a red wax seal depicting a lion, a badger, an eagle and a snake, with a large H in the center.

Breaking the seal revealed a letter in flowing green script. Looking over it, Roisin read out loud: " 'Dear Miss O'Conner, you have been invited to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...' "

There was more, but her father had been passing by and burst in roaring. Not even looking at the name, he grabbed the parchment and tore it to shreds.

Dragging them back to the room, he spent a good quarter hour yelling at them, then went back to mumbling about how “they’d never find us here”.

The next morning, they were woken up by the manager, who was looking for the addressees of the hundred or so letters that had been left down at reception.

Whoever was writing to them, Roisin decided, they had to be given credit for persistence.

Once Vernon had disposed of the letters, this time making sure that Harry and Roisin stayed locked in the room the entire time, they were on the road again.

They followed the same pattern as yesterday, with the exception of Vernon stopping at a small store and returning with a bulky package. Roisin was starting to worry about her own mental health if she had to put up with much more of her brother's moaning.

That evening, they ended up rowing to a tiny island on the sea. Vernon was convinced that no-one would ever find them there.

Rationally, Roisin agreed with him. On the other hand, the letter-senders had known their location right down to the motel room.

Barely stopping herself from pointing this out, Roisin only said that if this didn't stop them, nothing would.

Of course, it turned out to be the second option.

At exactly midnight, someone started banging on the doors with all the force of a battering ram.

Dudley sat up with a jolt from his bed on the couch. Roisin fell off the bench that she had been lying on. Vernon and Petunia came skidding in from the bedroom, Vernon wielding a gun and shouting.

There was a pause, then the door was literally knocked off its hinges, revealing a huge figure filling the doorway, outlined against the storm.

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Note: I am terrible with accents, so use your imagination. You are reading Fanfiction, so I'm sure you have some.

Note: I am getting a lot asking why Roisin's letter is addressed to Miss O'Conner. It will be explained in the next chapter. Don't worry, it's not a Mary-Sue thing, just a bit of background.

Chapter Three

A huge, giant of a man stood in the doorway, looking quite fearsome. His beard and long, shaggy hair were wild and tangled, and his eyes glimmered like black beetles.

Vernon, Petunia and Dudley stood frozen, trembling in fear.

Roisin was still half asleep, her mind still too blurred to register the shock that she should be feeling.

Harry wanted to know what was going on.

The giant ducked his head to get into the hut, and then turned to pick up the door and set it back on its hinges. The noise of the storm outside dropped somewhat. He turned to look at them. "Couldn't make us a cup of tea, could yeh? Been a long journey..."

Roisin shook her head behind the man's back. An entrance like that, and he expected any of them to be in a condition to make tea! She started moving toward Harry as the man stumped over to the couch, where Dudley remained, unmoving. "Budge up, ye great lump."

Dudley squeaked and ran to hide behind Petunia, who still cowered behind Vernon. Roisin rolled her eyes. Would it kill her family to show a little backbone every once in a while? Sure, she was scared too, but there was no need to let this man know about it!

Ignoring the rest of the hut's occupants, the giant turned his attention toward Harry. "Last time I saw you, you was only a baby. You look a lot like your dad, but you have your mum's eyes."

In the corner, Vernon made a funny noise, but seemed to pull himself together. "I demand that you leave at once, sir! You are breaking and entering!"

Well, it was nice to see that her father wasn't a total coward, but somehow, Roisin didn't think that yelling at the stranger would be all that beneficial to Vernon's continued good health.

Either way, the stranger remained less than intimidated, jerking the gun out of Vernon's hands and twisting it into a pretzel. "Ah, shut up, Dursley, ya great prune."

Roisin's father made another funny noise. Roisin wondered if she was the only one who thought it sounded like a mouse being trodden on.

The giant turned back to Harry. "Anyway – Harry, a very happy birthday to yeh. Got something for yeh, here, too."

Roisin felt her stomach let out a growl at the sight of a large, sticky chocolate cake, reminding her of how long it had been since her last proper meal. Still, she hoped someone would have the sense to find out who the stranger was before eating anything.

Apparently, Harry might have been thinking along the same lines, because he looked down at the cake, then back up at the giant. "Who are you?"

The giant chuckled. Roisin thought it sounded a bit like distant thunder, but that could have been the storm outside. "True, I haven't introduced myself. Rubeus Hagrid, keeper of the Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts."

Hogwarts! That was the name of the school in the letters! Roisin turned her attention back to Hagrid, who had just finished talking. He

looked at the fireplace, still holding last evening's pathetic attempts at a fire, and snorted in disgust. Leaning over the fireplace, he did something, and a blazing fire roared to life. Roisin barely managed not to let out a coo of delight at the warmth that spread through the hut, then blinked at the number of things that Hagrid began to take out of his pockets. A kettle, a packet of sausages, a poker, a tea pot, and the list went on.

Still in a state of shock, no one said anything while the man cooked, although Dudley fidgeted slightly when the first sausages were slid off the poker, despite Vernon's warnings.

Harry and Roisin, however, pounced on the food as Hagrid chuckled. "Yer great puddin' of a son don't need any more fattening up, Dursley."

Finally, when it became obvious that no-one was going to explain anything, Harry spoke up again. "Sorry, but I still don't know who you are."

Hagrid laughed again. "Call me Hagrid, everyone does. Like I said, I'm keeper of the Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts. Yeh know all about Hogwarts, of course."

Roisin rolled her eyes. She seemed to be doing that a lot lately. If they had known about Hogwarts, they would have had a proper idea of why they were being dragged all over the bloody country. Harry was a bit more diplomatic. "Er... no. Sorry."

Hagrid looked shocked, glaring at the other three Dursleys, who backed away quickly. "Sorry! It's them as should be sorry! I knew yeh weren't gettin' yer letters, but I never thought yeh wouldn't know about Hogwarts! Didn't yeh wonder where yer parents learnt it all?"

Harry and Roisin leaned forward eagerly. "Learned all what?"

Hagrid's expression changed from shock to fury. The Dursleys scurried into a corner. "ALL WHAT? Now wait jus' one second!" He glared at Vernon. "Do you mean ter tell me that these two – that Harry Potter – know nothing about...about anythin'!"

Roisin drew herself up in indignation. All right, so she wasn't top of the class, but she wasn't stupid either! Harry appeared to be thinking the same thing. "I know some things. I can do maths and stuff!"

Hagrid waved that off. "About our world, I mean. I don't believe Miss O'Conner never told yeh. Your world, my world. Yer parents' world."

"What world?"

What did her Nana have to do with this? Seeing Hagrid's face, Roisin decided to ask that later and prudently took a step away from her family and behind Harry. Hagrid looked ready to explode. "Dursley!"

Vernon muttered something that sounded like "mimblewimble". He had gone whiter than a sheet. Hagrid stared at Harry, voice lowering to a whisper. "But yeh must know about yer mum and dad. I mean, they're famous. You're famous."

Roisin frowned. That made no sense, given her parents obsession with popularity. If Aunt Lily had been famous, her mother would have been bragging about it to Heaven and back, wouldn't she? Harry blinked in surprise. "My parents weren't famous, were they?"

Hagrid ran a hand through his bushy hair. "Yeh don't know... Yeh don't know who yeh are?"

Vernon seemed to recover his courage. "Stop right there, sir! I forbid you to tell him anything!"

Roisin shook her head. It was nice to see that her father did have the occasional bit of backbone, but couldn't he at least try to choose a time that was less likely to get him killed? Even so, she didn't think anyone could stand up to the furious look that Hagrid had just levelled at him. When he spoke, his voice trembled with rage. "Yeh never told him? Never told him what was in the letter? I was there! I saw Dumbledore leave it for him! And yeh kept it from him all these years?"

Harry leaned forward again. "Kept what from me?"

Petunia's horrified gasp was audible even over Vernon's panicked shout. "Stop! I forbid you!"

Hagrid growled. "Ah, go an' boil yer heads, both of yeh. Harry, yer a wizard."

Except for the noise of wind and sea, the hut was dead silent. Roisin blinked. That probably made her a witch, then. No wonder her family had been so worked up about the letters, this was so far away from normal that it wasn't even funny!

The silence was broken by Harry's gasp. "I'm a what?"

Hagrid sat back down on the couch, which groaned under his weight. "A wizard. And a right good one, once yer trained up a bit. With a mum and dad like yours, what else could yeh be? Now it's past time you read yer letter. Yeh too, girl."

He handed Harry a letter, nearly identical to the one that Roisin had nearly read back at the Motel. Roisin ignored the 'girl' and accepted her letter. Opening it, she read aloud, keeping an amused eye on her family's faces.

"Won't this be interesting to read...?"

'HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY

Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore

(Order of Merlin, First Class...)

yada yada yada. Lot of titles there. Let's see...

Dear Miss O'Conner,

You have been invited to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a full list of books and equipment necessary. Term begins on September 1st. We await your owl no later than July 31st

Sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress.”

Roisin slowly folded up the letter. That really was interesting. Questions flew through her mind. Why were they using her grandmother’s maiden name in the address? Was this all just some bizarre dream? Dimly, she heard Harry ask what the letter meant by ‘await you owl’, and Hagrid pulling a rather rumped owl out of his pocket, writing a quick note, and throwing it out into the storm.

He came back over as Vernon managed to recover his voice. “They’ll not be going!”

Roisin narrowed her eyes. The Hell she wouldn’t! Hagrid snorted. “I’d like to see a great Muggle like you try and stop them.”

Muggle? What was a Muggle? Harry vocalized the question. “A Muggle, Harry, is what we call non-magic folk. And it’s yer bad luck that yeh grew up in a family of the biggest muggles I ever laid eyes on, ‘cept for yer cousin.”

“We swore when we took him in that we’d put a stop to that nonsense!” There was a definite note of hysteria in Vernon’s voice. “Swore we’d stamp it out of him! Wizard, indeed!”

Hold it, they’d known about all this? “You knew?” Harry and Roisin spoke as one. “You knew I’m a Wizard / Witch?”

Petunia finally tired of holding her tongue. She started shrieking at Harry, ignoring her daughter completely. Ah, denial. “Knew? Knew? Of course we knew! How could you not be, by dratted sister being what she was! She got a letter just like yours and went off to that school, and came back every holiday, pockets filled with frogspawn, turning teacups into rats! I was the only one who saw her for the freak she was! But my mother and father, oh no! It was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud to have a witch in the family!”

She took a deep breath as Roisin tried to shake the ringing out of her ears. Wishing her mother would use a lower decibel, she muttered sarcastically, "Don't hold it in or anything, Mum. Let it out."

Petunia had obviously wanted to say all this for years. "Then she met that Potter at school and she left and got married and had you, and of course I knew you'd be just the same, just as abnormal as she was. Then, if you please, she went and got herself blown up and we got landed with you! Now you've gone and rubbed off on my poor daughter!"

Not for the first time, Roisin marvelled at her mother's gift for denial. Just because they blamed Harry for bad weather didn't mean that Roisin hadn't done some pretty abnormal things herself. Harry, meanwhile, had gone very white. "Blown up? You told me they died in a car crash!"

Roisin winced in apprehension as Hagrid leapt to his feet. "Car crash? A car crash kill Lily and James Potter? It's an outrage! Harry Potter not knowing his own story when every kid in our world knows his name!"

Harry interrupted before the giant man could really get going. "But why? What happened?"

The anger drained from Hagrid's face. "I never expected this. They told me there might be some trouble gettin' hold of yeh, but Dumbledore never said how much yeh wouldn't know. Ah, Harry, I'm probably not the right one to tell yeh, but yeh can't go off to Hogwarts not knowing."

He gave the Dursleys another nasty look. They scuttled back into their corner. Roisin stole a blanket off the couch and tugged Harry down next to her as Hagrid told them of a Wizard named Voldemort, who had risen, styled himself a Dark Lord, and tried to take over the Wizarding World, killing anyone who tried to oppose him. How Hogwarts was one of the only safe places left, Dumbledore the only person that Voldemort feared. How Aunt Lily and her husband James were part of those few who stood up to him, and how they managed

to get on Voldemort's hit list. How Voldemort had come to the Potter's house when Harry was only a year old, intent on killing them, and how Harry had somehow survived, destroying Voldemort in the process.

Well, that was certainly enough to make someone famous. Roisin slipped an arm around her cousin, who looked as though he was reliving a nightmare. Hagrid looked at them sadly. "Took yeh from the ruined house meself, on Dumbledore's orders. Brought yeh to this ruddy lot."

"Load of old tosh." Roisin and Harry jumped, having almost forgotten the other three presences in the room. Vernon had apparently rebuilt some of his courage. "Now look here, boy. I'll admit that there's something strange about you – probably nothing a good beating wouldn't have cured – and about your parents, well, they were weirdos, no denying it, and the world's better off without them, in my opinion."

Roisin sighed, was her father trying to get himself killed? Heedless, Vernon went on. "Asked for all they got, getting mixed up with all those wizardly types. Just what I expected, always knew that they'd come to a sticky end –"

Hagrid jumped up, pointing his umbrella at Vernon. "I'm warning you, Dursley. Just one more word..."

The prospect of being skewered seemed to knock some sense back into Vernon. He shut up. Harry spoke up. "But what happened to Voldemort? Sorry, to You-Know-Who?"

Hagrid shrugged "Nobody knows, Harry. He just vanished. Some say he died. Same night he tried to kill you. Makes yeh even more famous."

That did sound very impressive. Harry, however, was not convinced. "Hagrid, there must be some mistake. I can't be a wizard. I'm just Harry."

Roisin wished her cousin would stop trying to deny it. When Hagrid asked if Harry had ever made something happen, Roisin decided that she had been quiet long enough. "Well, there was those incidents with the wig and the roof. And the snake at the zoo."

Harry gave his cousin a look. "What about the paint-pot and changing the colour of your room? You can't tell me that was normal!"

Roisin shrugged. "I'm not the one trying to deny my apparent abilities. I wonder what else we could do."

Hagrid was beaming. "See? Harry Potter not a wizard. I bet you'll be right famous at Hogwarts, you'll see."

Vernon interrupted. "Haven't I told you they'll not be going? Roisin has an acceptance to Our Lady of Grace! The boy'll be going to Stonewall High and he'll be grateful for it! If he goes to that school he'll need all sorts of rubbish! Spell books and wands and..."

Hagrid cut him off. A good thing, as it saved Roisin from doing something drastic. "If they want to go, a great Muggle like you won't stop them. Stop Lily and James Potter's son from going to Hogwarts? And the scion of the O'Conner Clan! Yer mad! They'll be going to the finest school of magic in the world! They'll be with youngsters of their own sort, and be learning under the greatest headmaster Hogwarts has ever had, Albus Dumbledore!"

This apparently drove Vernon over the edge. "I am not paying for some crackpot old fool to teach them magic tricks!"

That apparently drove Hagrid over the edge. He pointed the umbrella at Vernon again, each word slow and clear with anger. "Never-insult-Albus-Dumbledore-in-front-of-me."

Roisin scrambled to her feet as the umbrella moved to point at Dudley. Yes, he was a bullying jerk, but he was still her twin. She was too late, however, as there was a flash of light and a squeal, and her brother was now sporting a curling, pink pig's tail!

Vernon, Petunia and Dudley all screamed, fleeing into the bedroom and slamming the door. Roisin took a few steps after them, then shrugged and settled back onto her bench. They couldn't do anything until morning, and she was hell to live with when she didn't get enough sleep.

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Thanks,

Nat

Disclaimer: See previous chapters.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the afore-mentioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

Chapter Four

Fionna Dursley nee O'Conner was a woman well into her seventies.

Despite this, she remained as vibrant and energetic as a woman of several decades younger. She was also an Irish-born red-head, with all the characteristics that this suggested.

As of right now, contemplating the dignity of dancing with sheer joy at the news she had just received. Her grand-daughter was a witch!

She had suspected, of course, there had been signs when little Roisin had been growing up, but with her son's fixation on Normality, she had started to worry.

Of course, the announcement of Roisin's magical abilities also meant that it was time for a little chat with the girl. She needed to know the rest of her family history before she went off to Hogwarts.

Petunia rarely talked about her side of the family, in fact both she and Vernon were perfectly content to ignore that Petunia's parents and sister had even existed. And the Dursley line was Normal to the point of Depressing, with the occasional exception. One such exception was Fionna herself.

Fionna had been born in Northern Ireland, the youngest daughter of the Chieftain of the prominent, but very secluded O'Conner Clan.

What was not generally known, was that the reason the Clan was so secluded, was because they were entirely magical, even those who married into the Clan.

When she was very young, barely three or four, Fionna and several of the Clan's youngest children had been sent to England to escape the brewing Civil War. When she was eight, the children of the clan returned to Ireland, but to a Clan that had lost several, including Fionna's parents.

The O'Conner Clan had a tradition of at least one child of the ruling family being sent to Hogwarts. None of her siblings had elected to go, so three years after her return, Fionna had been sent to Hogwarts, making quite a name for herself.

A few years after Fionna's graduation, the Muggle World War II broke out, taking place at the same time as the rise of the Dark Lord Grindewald. Loving very little more than a good fight, many of the O'Conner Clan joined the fight with great enthusiasm.

It was during this war that Fionna met and fell in love with a Muggle-born soldier by the name of Frank Dursley, despite the scandal it would cause amongst her family, normally resulting in the offender being cast out.

It was also during this war, that most of the O'Conner Clan was wiped out by a stray bomb while on an extended tour of their lands.

Because of this, the Clan was willing to ignore Frank's Muggle blood to the extent of allowing Fionna to officially stay in the Clan, and to accept any Magical decedents.

Fionna moved back to England with her new love, where they married and had two children, Vernon and Marge. Much to her dismay, neither child showed any sign of Magic, and then Frank had died not long after Marge's birth, leaving no real buffer between the children and the rest of the Depressingly Normal Dursleys.

This given, it was no real surprise that both children grew up with no knowledge of magic, Vernon marrying a Muggle woman as intent on being Normal as he was.

Fionna still kept in occasional contact with her family, however, and had joyfully written to them in 1981 with the news that Roisin was showing signs of being a witch.

Since then, she had treasured her Grand-daughter, nurturing her creative imagination with stories and legends of Magic.

Now she knew for certain, and had confirmed it through a discussion with her old school friend, Minerva McGonagall, when the Deputy Headmistress had floored her in exasperation and asked if she could please do something about her stubborn off-spring constantly ignoring the Hogwarts letters.

Listening to her friend rant, Fionna had thought that she would have paid good money to have seen her son's reaction to the letters. She had promised that if Hagrid failed, then Fionna would track down her family and force feed them the letter's contents.

Thankfully, Hagrid had not failed, and Fionna was preparing to meet her Grand-daughter and great-nephew-in-law at Diagon Alley. Hagrid led Harry and Roisin into a small pub called the Leaky Cauldron, keeping a firm hold on Roisin, who had tried to detour into the large bookshop next door.

Upon entering the pub, Harry and Roisin received the shock of their lives. The small space was filled with people of all shapes and sizes, some not even looking quite human. All wore particularly strange clothing, or what were probably wizarding robes.

The barman recognized Hagrid, who was admittedly somewhat hard to miss, and called out to him. Hagrid shook his head. "Can't, Tom. Hogwarts business, taking Harry to get his school things."

Both Harry and Roisin wished that he had kept to a lower decibel when the entire pub went dead silent.

The next thing they knew, there was a scraping of chairs, and every customer in the place was crowding around trying to shake Harry's hand. Kicking and shoving in an attempt to stay on her feet, Roisin

was nearly swept under before she felt herself levitated over the crowd and floating toward an older woman with red hair and a frown directed at Hagrid.

Roisin was set back on her feet and instantly threw herself into her grandmother's arms. Fionna's face softened into a smile and she hugged the girl as Hagrid finally managed to extract Harry from the mob's clutches.

The small group made their way out to the back of the pub into an alley, where Hagrid started counting bricks above the trashcans. Much to the children's surprise, the wall melted away to reveal a bustling street filled with people, the vast majority dressed like the witches and wizards in the pub.

This time, at least, Hagrid had the wisdom to not, announce their presence, so they quickly made their way to a large building in the middle of the alley. It was Gringotts, the bank that Hagrid had told them about earlier that day.

Looking at the golden gates, Roisin noticed the inscription there, a small but very ominous poem warning potential thieves not to try anything. Happily imagining if they would see the "more than treasure" that the rhyme spoke of, Roisin did a small double-take at the sight of a small, ugly-looking creature with sharp fangs guarding the doors. So that was a goblin.

Inside, there were goblins weighing, measuring, stamping packages, and all manner of things. Fionna firmly took Roisin's hand and looked up at Hagrid. "You take Harry, I'll take Roisin. I don't like those cart rides and the less time it takes, the better."

Hagrid nodded in agreement and made his way to a goblin teller. Roisin and her grandmother went to another, shorter line. As they waited, Fionna began explaining how things worked. "There are three types of coins in Wizarding currency. There are the gold galleons, silver sickles, and bronze knuts. A galleon is worth seventeen sickles, and a sickle is worth twenty-nine knuts. You'll get the hang of it soon enough."

Roisin nodded. "How am I going to pay for Hogwarts, Nana? You can't honestly tell me that Mum or Dad will be willing to open a school account for me."

Fionna laughed. "No, I have to admit that my son has been something of a disappointment in that regard. The O'Conner clan is a very old and prominent wizarding family, and they didn't completely disown me when I married your grandfather. Not very keen on muggles, you see. They thought I was marrying beneath me. But our clan was almost wiped out during the Second World War, so the current Clan Head is willing to ignore the generation of muggle blood and accept you as part of the Clan."

Roisin nodded in understanding. "Then that's why my Hogwarts letter was addressed to Miss O'Conner, instead of Miss Dursley. So it's all being paid for by the Clan?"

Fionna nodded. "I wrote my family as soon as you told me about the incident in your art class, telling them about you. Then I called in a favor with an old friend to get you enrolled. The Clan set up an account for if you were accepted. If you weren't, the money would have reverted to the main vault."

They were at the teller booth now. Fionna produced a golden key from her purse and handed it to the goblin, "School trust fund for Roisin O'Conner, Vault 409."

The goblin carefully inspected the key, and then signaled for another goblin. "Narchak will take you down to the Vaults."

They followed Narchak through a door and down a stone corridor lit with blazing torches until they reached what looked like a small railway. They got into a small cart and went shooting off into the tunnels at high speed. Roisin's long hair flew out behind her as she leaned over the front of the cart. This was fun! Fionna shut her eyes, gripping the seat tightly.

Eventually, they screeched to a stop outside a small door in the passage wall. Opening the door with the golden key revealed a more than generous amount of gold, silver and bronze coins. Sweeping

several of each into a small money-bag, they exited the vault and went on another lightning-fast cart ride back up to the surface.

Exiting into the main lobby, Fionna discreetly handed her granddaughter a hairbrush. Roisin took it, reminding herself to tie her hair up next time she visited Gringotts. The cart ride may have been fun, but it was hell on the hair.

Walking out of the bank, Fionna pulled out the list of things that Roisin would need for Hogwarts. "We'll go to Flourish and Blotts first, dear. That's the book shop. Hopefully we'll be able to pick up some extra reading to help you get a better grip on how the Magical world works."

The book shop was filled with people, also doing their Hogwarts shopping. Fighting their way through the crowd, the two of them managed to locate The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1), a History of Magic, Magical Theory, Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration, One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi, Magical Drafts and Potions and The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection.

Fionna also tracked down Hogwarts: A History, Magical Families of Brittan and Ireland and Wizardry Throughout the Ages, insisting that it would make things less confusing once she actually got to Hogwarts. After that, they temporarily split up, Fionna going to the Apocathary and a store aptly named "General and Random Equipment" for Roisin's potion supplies and other equipment, while Roisin headed for Madam Malkin's: Robes for All Occasions.

After a short wait, a harried looking assistant ushered her over to a stool, slipped a robe over her head, and began pinning it to the right length, taking measurements as she went along.

The stool next to Roisin was occupied by a girl about her age, apparently affected by a chronic inability to stay still for over a minute. The assistant seeing to her looked on the verge of killing someone.

Making another valiant effort to stay still, the girl turned to Roisin. "Hi, I'm Desdemona Moon. Are you going to Hogwarts too?"

Someone needed to cut this girl's sugar intake. "Roisin Dursley-O'Conner. Yes, I'll be a first-year."

Desdemona's eyes lit up and she bounced on her chair, drawing what sounded like a growl from the assistant. "Me too! Any relation to the O'Conner clan? Mother said that one of them was supposed to be starting this year."

Roisin nodded. "Fionna O'Conner is my Grandmother, but my dad's a squib, so she's bringing me for my supplies."

Desdemona gave her a sympathetic look. "You poor thing. Don't worry, just stick with me and I'll show you the ropes. I wouldn't go around telling everyone that your parents are squibs, though. A lot of people think that it's even worse than being a Muggle-born."

Before Roisin could reply, the two assistants stood up. Desdemona's assistant looked like she was restraining herself from a celebratory dance as the other said "Well, there you are dears, all finished. Just go to the counter and they'll sort you out."

In short order, they had paid for their robes, along with one or two non-uniform ones, and were out of the shop. Desdemona waved to a red-haired girl just as Fionna walked toward them, along with a stern-looking lady and a young boy who also looked around first-year age.

Fionna smiled at Roisin. "Roisin, this is an old friend of mine, Augusta Longbottom, and her grandson, Neville. Augusta, this is my granddaughter, Roisin."

Roisin squashed the automatic urge to squirm as Mrs. Longbottom looked at her. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Ma'am."

Mrs. Longbottom nodded. "A very polite young lady. We will have to catch up together soon, Fionna. Come along Neville, we need to get your robes."

The boy hurried after the old lady, shooting them an apologetic look. Fionna shook her head, and then took Roisin's hand again. "Come along, child. It's time to go choose your wand."

Choosing wands, it turned out, was no where near as easy as it sounded.

To start with, one had to deal with being shocked out of their skin by the wand-maker, Mr. Ollivander. After that, was the very disconcerting experience of literally being measured from head to toe.

Then, you actually chose the wand.

Roisin and Fionna were joined in the wand shop by Desdemona and the girl she had waved at, Susan Bones, who went to choose her wand first.

The first wand Susan tried was willow and dragon heart-string; she waved it nervously. Roisin ducked as a vase flew through the air, narrowly missing her head. Straightening, she threw Susan a nasty look. Susan returned a slightly sheepish one, and tried a different wand.

Several wands later, Susan settled on a ten inch birch and phoenix feather wand. Quickly paying, Susan waved good bye and ran to meet her aunt, promising to see them at Hogwarts.

Then it was Roisin's turn.

The first few wands were snatched out of her hand only seconds after she had raised them into the air. The ninth wand let out a loud bang, setting a chair cushion on fire.

Twelve wands after that, a thirteen inch redwood and unicorn hair wand erupted in a shower of silver sparks, and Roisin sat down to wait for Desdemona.

Desdemona was much quicker choosing her wand, trying only five or six before settling on a twelve inch oak and dragon heartstring one.

Paying for their wands and exiting the shop, the two girls parted ways, promising to meet at the Hogwarts express.

Fionna cast what she identified as a point me spell to locate Harry and Hagrid, and together they headed back to Privet Drive for a few short months before starting Hogwarts.

hp

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A/N: OK, another chapter done. I've looked at my hit counter so I know people are reading this. If you have enough time to read this story, I'm sure you can spare another five or ten seconds to review.

Thanks all,
Nat

Disclaimer: See previous chapters.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the afore-mentioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

A/N: Book 7 has come! My sister got it first, but I finally got my greedy little hands on it yesterday, and finished it in four and a half hours. My little sister is convinced I'm a freak.

A/N: GinnyLover14 asked if Roisin being called O'Conner meant that she wasn't related to the Dursleys. To clarify: As mentioned in the last chapter, because she is a witch, the O'Conner clan is willing to accept Roisin. Therefore, her family name in the Wizarding World is O'Conner. In the Muggle World she is still Roisin Dursley.

Chapter Five

The months between Diagon Alley and leaving for Hogwarts were not fun, but could hardly be called boring, either.

Vernon and Petunia had tried to move Roisin in with Harry, to 'prevent further contamination', but had stopped when Dudley started spewing up slime at random intervals and Roisin could be found with her nose buried in a potions textbook. Finding out that your witch of a daughter was actually willing to use her gifts tended to put things in a much clearer perspective.

Roisin was also now getting what she called the 'Harry Treatment', that is, Vernon and Petunia ignored her existence, and Dudley refused to stay in the same room as her.

Harry was used to this treatment, and actually found it somewhat of an improvement over the Dursleys previous behavior. Roisin, on the other hand, was used to having her parents dote on her, and found it all very lonely and upsetting.

In light of this, Roisin had taken to going on long walks down to the nearest motel, where Fionna had quietly re-located herself to keep an

eye on Roisin ever since the confrontation with Vernon about why Fionna showed no surprise at the mention of magic.

It was Fionna who told her that as she technically didn't know yet that she wasn't allowed to do magic outside of Hogwarts, now would be a good time to get in some practice

Fionna told Roisin stories of her own days at Hogwarts, about the houses, about the ghosts (and poltergeist) and about the things that were best avoided.

Roisin also kept in touch with Desdemona and Susan, promising to meet them on either the platform or the train to Hogwarts.

As September 1st drew nearer, Roisin chose to let Harry deal with asking her parents for transport to Kings Cross. If they agreed, good, and she wouldn't have to interact with them any more than strictly necessary. If they refused, she would just ask her grandmother.

Luckily, that was not necessary, and soon their trunks were packed, ready for Hogwarts.

September 1st dawned bright and clear.

Vernon and Petunia had consented to take them to London, on their way to get Dudley's tail removed (Roisin still burst into giggles thinking about it), even going so far as to unload their trunks and put them on a trolley. Roisin was starting to get a very bad feeling about something.

She was proven right when her father looked back at the two of them, grinning nastily. "Well, well, well. Platform 9, Platform 10, but no Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. Have a fun year."

Roisin muttered something unrepeatable as the rest of the family drove off, laughing.

Then they were left at Kings Cross, with the dilemma of being stuck at the station with no idea of how to get onto the platform.

They only had half an hour, so it would be well past eleven before an owl could get to her grandmother and back, and Fionna was at a friend's for lunch, anyway.

Susan and Desdemona were either on the way to or already at the station, which would make them difficult to owl, since you had to give the owl actual directions, and Hedwig didn't seem to like her much.

Harry finally suggested asking the Station-Master. Roisin gave him a flat look. "There is no way that is going to work. We don't know where the platform is or where in the country Hogwarts is located, and we're magical! What makes you think he'll know?"

Harry frowned at her and went to ask anyway. Roisin sat down on her trolley to wait for him.

Sure enough, the guard Harry approached only looked cross and wanted to know if Harry thought he was being funny. Harry started to walk back to the trolleys, where Roisin waited with an I-told-you-so look, when a plump woman surrounded by a gaggle of red-haired boys and a girl, obviously her children, walked by. "Packed with muggles, as usual..."

That certainly caught his attention. Only magical folk referred to normal people as muggles, as far as he knew. He waved Roisin over as the second-to-last boy disappeared somehow, leaving only the girl and a tall, gangly boy around Harry's age. Oh, well, now or never... "Excuse me, ma'am?"

Roisin came up behind him as the woman turned around. "Oh, hello dear. Hogwarts too?"

Roisin stayed quiet as Harry replied the affirmative. "Yes. See, we don't know how to..."

The woman nodded in understanding. "How to get onto the platform? Just run straight at the barrier between platforms 9 and 10. Don't be nervous."

Now why would they be nervous about running straight at a brick wall? was Roisin's sarcastic thought as she took off, hearing the little girl wish Harry luck behind her.

Bracing herself for impact, Roisin opened her eyes to see a bright red train and, judging by the number of owls and wizarding robes, a platform full of Hogwarts students and assorted family members.

Snapping out of her awed daze, Roisin dodged out of the way just in time to miss being run over by Harry and the gangly boy.

Catching sight of Desdemona, who was bouncing all over the place like the energizer bunny, Roisin let the boys off with a nasty look and headed over to her friend.

Desdemona stood – sort of – next to a blonde girl, a tall boy, and two other boys who looked like walking definitions of the term 'thug'. Roisin noticed that Hyperactivity was apparently normal with her new friend, as none of the others seemed particularly concerned.

Or at least, none of them looked disturbed or were backing away slowly.

Waving Roisin over, Desdemona made the introductions. "Roisin, this is Pansy Parkinson," (the blonde girl) "Blaise Zabini," (the tall boy) "and these two here are Vincent Crabbe and Greg Goyle. Everyone, this is the girl I was telling you about, Roisin O'Conner."

Pansy gave a welcoming smile. "Hi. Any relation to Fionna O'Conner?"

Roisin nodded warily. The Clan hadn't given out details on why Fionna had left the Wizarding World, and Desdemona had suggested that she not mention her muggle heritage. "Grand-daughter. It's nice to meet you all."

Blaise shot her a grin, white teeth contrasting sharply with his darker complexion. "You too. Come on, let's find a place to sit before all the compartments are gone."

Sure enough, an empty compartment was hard to find. The problem was solved, however, when Crabbe and Goyle (Pansy had said to

call them by their last names) had walked into a nearly empty compartment and evicted the two first years previously occupying it.

Shortly after loading their trunks and settling down for the ride, the train started moving, and they were joined by Millicent Bulstrode and Theo Nott.

Crabbe and Goyle left soon after that, when a blond boy by the name of Draco Malfoy showed up. Roisin didn't think much of her first impression of him, which was a spoilt rich brat that reminded her a bit too much of her brother. Thankfully, Draco didn't stick around for long, taking Crabbe and Goyle with him to annoy the rest of the train.

As the train started to leave main London, Roisin pulled out her Herbology book, the only one she hadn't read. It was amazing how many common plants and flowers could be used in spells, potions and rituals!

Blaise joined her and started a debate over violets verses lavender in calming potions, quickly drawing Millie into the discussion.

Theo started a game of solitaire, and Pansy and Desdemona started looking through the latest edition of Witch Weekly. At least it was an improvement to having Desdemona bouncing off the walls.

Around lunchtime, a witch came around with a food trolley, filled with things like pumpkin pasties, cauldron cakes, chocolate frogs, and other things that Roisin had never even heard of.

Fionna had warned Roisin against Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans, and she saw no reason to contest that when Theo chose cayenne pepper and looked ready to shoot flames out of his mouth.

The rest of the trip was mostly uneventful, disregarding the reappearance of Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle, who came in complaining about Harry Potter's rejection and some Weasley's 'blasted piece of cat bait!'.

Roisin thought that Malfoy really needed to shut up about the incident. He was starting to sound disturbingly like a jilted lover.

It was starting to get dark when the announcement came that they would be at Hogsmeade Station in an hour.

The first-years took this as a cue to change out of every-day clothing and into their new school robes. Smoothing a hand over the soft fabric of her new uniform, Roisin sat down with Pansy and Millicent to re-fix their hair. First impressions were very important.

Desdemona leaned back on her seat. "How do you think we'll be sorted? I heard some older student's telling another first-year about how we have to wrestle a troll."

Theo snorted in disgust. "You have got to be kidding. How is going up against a troll going to get us into a house?"

Roisin snickered, looking up from braiding Pansy's hair. "I don't know. Nana was telling me about the Houses and general defining traits. Maybe the ones who charge in and attack the troll go to Gryffindor, House of the stupidly brave. Those who try to reason with the troll or comfort it into submission go to Hufflepuff, House of the gentle idiot peacemakers. Those who come up with a plethora of spells or knowledgeable facts that might help them find a weak spot go to Ravenclaw, House of the Bookish. Those who wait until the Troll is busy with someone else, then sneak around and shoot it in the back from a safe distance go to Slytherin, House of the clever and devious."

Blaise fell off his seat, keeled over with laughter, just as the announcement came that they would be arriving at Hogwarts in five minutes.

The Hogwarts Express pulled to a stop at a small, dark station, and they joined the crowd of students pushing their way to the train doors.

Piling onto the platform, they could see Hagrid calling the first years over to him, towering head, shoulders and upper torso over the rest of the crowd.

Roisin caught a glimpse of Harry and the red-haired boy from the platform as she and the other first years followed Hagrid down a winding, slippery path, heavily shadowed on both sides.

Finally, the path opened onto the shore of an enormous lake, and there was a collective 'Ooooooh!' from the students as they had their first glimpse of Hogwarts.

Perched on top of the high cliff that rose before them on the other side of the lake, its many windows shone with light, illuminating the castle's towers and spires against the backdrop of the starry night sky.

Docked nearby was a fleet of little boats. Roisin joined Desdemona, Blaise and Theo, directing Goyle back over to Malfoy at Hagrid's cry of "No more'n four to a boat!"

Once everyone was more or less settled in a boat, Hagrid took a last look around, checking for stragglers. "Everybody in? Right, forward!"

The lake was as smooth as black glass as the little fleet of boats sailed across it, closer and closer to the cliff. Everyone ducked their heads at Hagrid's warning, and they passed through a curtain of ivy, down a dark tunnel, and into a huge lit cavern that seemed to serve as some kind of underground harbor.

Everyone clambered out of the boats with only a few near dunkings, then up a shadowed passageway to emerge in front of Hogwarts. They walked up a small flight of stone steps, and stopped in front of the huge oak doors.

Hagrid raised a fist and knocked three times on the carved wood. The doors opened immediately, revealing a stern faced witch with black hair, wearing emerald robes and glasses that somehow only made her seem even more intimidating. Roisin got the impression that she was much like Granny Fionna; gentle and loving to family and close friends, but crossing her could only be described as A Very Bad Idea. This must be Professor McGonagall.

The professor opened the doors wide and led the first years into Hogwarts. The Entrance Hall was brightly lit with torches and candles, and big enough to fit Roisin's entire house several times over. A magnificent marble staircase led to the upper floors.

A doorway to their right lead to the Great Hall, and Roisin could hear the sound of hundreds of voices as the rest of the school waited for them.

Professor McGonagall led them across the floor and into a small chamber. The first years crowded in, standing somewhat closer to each other than they normally would. Glancing over at Blaise, Malfoy and Theo, Roisin recognized the expressions on their face. It was one that Dudley frequently wore when an authority figure showed up when his little gang was up to something. The 'I'm-Absolutely-Terrified-But-I'll-Die-Before-Actually-Admitting-It-In-Public' look.

Professor McGonagall called for their attention and started what sounded like a traditional welcoming speech. "Welcome to Hogwarts. The banquet will begin shortly, but first, you will all be sorted into your houses and take your seats at your House Table. The four houses are Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin. Each house has its own great and noble history, and all have produced outstanding witches and wizards. While at Hogwarts, your house will be like your family. You will sleep in your House Dormitories, take classes with your House Year mates, and your free time will be spent in your House Common Room. Through the year, your successes will earn you House Points, while any rule breaking will lose House Points."

As the Professor spoke, Roisin had the feeling that Points would be the least of their problems if Professor McGonagall caught any of them breaking rules.

Regardless of Roisin's thoughts, the woman continued. "At the end of the year, the house with the most points is awarded the House Cup. I hope that you each are a credit to whichever House becomes yours. The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few minutes. I suggest you take the time to straighten yourselves up while you wait. I will return when we are ready for you."

Pansy looked about ready to faint with nerves as Professor McGonagall left the room. Other students took the Professor up on her suggestion, straightening cloaks and nervously asking the person next to them if they had anything on their faces.

Roisin was desperately wishing for anything to happen to get her mind off her nerves, when several people screamed. Spinning around with a gasp, Roisin decided that she really needed to be careful what she wished for. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, a stream of about twenty ghosts had just streamed through the back wall and across the room. A girl with blonde pigtails practically dived out of the way as a ghost threatened to pass through her.

The ghosts seemed to be arguing, a fat man in a friar's habit in heated discussion with a ghost in a 15th century nobleman's ruff and tights. The fat friar was speaking, apparently protesting on someone's behalf. "...Forgive and forget, I say. We ought to give him another chance..."

The ghost with the ruff cut him off in exasperation. "My dear friar, haven't we given Peeves all the chances he deserves? He gives us all a bad name, and he isn't really even a ghost! Oh! What are you lot doing here?"

The ghosts had finally noticed the students. Ironically, many of the students looked like they would have preferred to remain ignored. The fat friar beamed at them. "New student's, I suppose? About to be sorted?"

A few of the faster-recovering students nodded mutely.

The friar beamed. "Excellent! Hope to see you in Hufflepuff. My old House, you know!"

Roisin immediately resolved to not be in Hufflepuff. The friar was way too cheerful than could be healthy, ghost or otherwise.

They were interrupted by Professor McGonagall's return. Giving the first years a final quick once over, the Deputy Headmistress instructed them to form a line and lead them into the Great Hall.

Entering the Hall, Roisin barely held back a gasp of wonder. The room was lit by thousands of candles that floated above the four tables, set with golden plates and goblets. The rest of the student body sat at the tables, dotted here and there by the occasional ghost.

At the front of the Hall was another table, where the teachers were seated.

Trying to avoid the eyes looking at her, Roisin looked up, and stifled another gasp. Granny Fionna had mentioned that the ceiling was charmed to look like the sky outside, but even knowing that still made it hard to believe that the hall didn't just open out into the heavens.

Roisin felt her nervousness return as the first years walked down between the two center tables, every eye in the Great Hall on them. They formed a line at the front of the Hall, facing the teacher's table. In front of them, Professor McGonagall placed a three legged stool and a pointed hat, dirty, patched and frayed.

Trying not to show her surprise, Roisin thought of how her mother would react upon seeing the hat. Probably would have fallen into a seizure out of sheer horror.

Reflecting on this, Roisin nearly missed the hat starting to sing. It started with a short introduction, then went on to give a description of each House and its characteristics and values. Finishing the song, the hat bowed to each of the four tables and fell silent.

In the applause that followed, Blaise leaned over from his spot next to her, whispering, "We just have to try on the hat? So much for wrestling a troll! I wanted to see how many Gryffindors got squashed!"

Roisin hushed him, giggling, as the first two students (Hannah Abbot and Susan Bones) were sent to Hufflepuff. The fat friar waved merrily.

Terry Boot and Mandy Brocklehurst went to Ravenclaw, followed by Lavender Brown to Gryffindor, and then it was Millicent's turn.

The girl was pale as she walked up to the hat on wobbly legs, and practically fell into her seat at the table second from the right when the hat pronounced her a 'SLYTHERIN!'

Trying not to faint with nerves, Roisin concentrated on the sorting. The hat seemed to take different amounts of time with different

students. Some were sent to a House almost immediately, whereas the current victim, sorry, student, Seamus Finnegan, had been sitting on the stool for almost a minute now.

The boy from Diagon Alley, Neville Longbottom, actually fell over on his way up to be sorted, and when he was pronounced a Gryffindor, forgot to take it off before going to his new table. Roisin tried not to laugh too hard as he jogged back to give it to MacDougal, Morag.

Draco Malfoy went to Slytherin less than five seconds after the hat had touched his head. The student after him was sent to Gryffindor. Desdemona whimpered quietly as her name was called. Roisin was too anxious about her name coming up to offer any reassurance.

Desdemona went to Slytherin after several seconds pause, and then it was "O'Conner, Roisin!"

Blaise gave her an encouraging pat on the back as she walked up to the hat. Roisin felt the hat descend on her head, and then it was like a little voice whispering in her ear. Where to place you, hmmm? Brains, and a desire to learn, but a bit too ruthless for Ravenclaw. Loyalty, but very exclusive, people have to earn it first. Roisin wished the hat would get on with it. Her grandmother had said that Gryffindor was the most popular house, maybe she should try to go there. That would show her parents! She would be great, rising above everyone else! Her plans to convince the hat were cut short when it exclaimed Well, that settles it. SLYTHERIN!

Relieved that the hat had finally chosen somewhere, Roisin joined Desdemona and Millicent, trying to stop herself from shaking with relief. Theo and Pansy quickly joined them.

There was quite a commotion when Harry's turn came, with nearly everyone in the Hall pointing and whispering, and the Gryffindor table being just a bit too enthusiastic when Harry joined them.

By the time the cheers died down, there were only three people left. Lisa Turpin became a Ravenclaw, followed by the boy from the station, Ron Weasley, joining Harry in Gryffindor.

By now, Blaise was looking decidedly green, enough so that Roisin was sure that there were going to be any number of truly awful jokes when he was finally sorted into Slytherin.

The Headmaster rose to his feet, spreading his arms open as Professor McGonagall took away the hat and stool. After a very short speech that made little to no sense, the students cheered and the previously empty dishes were suddenly piled high with food.

Helping herself to roast chicken, chips and vegetables, Roisin began to eat, listening to the dinner chatter around her. As the food disappeared, to be replaced by a variety of puddings, the talk turned to their families.

Some, like Draco Malfoy, were only children. ("Sole heir to the Malfoy name and fortune, you know." Hopefully the Malfoy line would end with him, too, if the rest of his family was like this.)

Theo and Pansy were also without siblings, but Desdemona had a younger brother who was due to start next year, and another who would arrive two years after that. Roisin sent up a silent prayer that they were a bit less active than their sister.

Millicent had an older sister who had left the previous year, and a brother who would start with Desdemona's youngest one. Blaise also had siblings who had already graduated, but was stuck as the baby of the family. Millicent assured him that being older was overrated, as younger siblings only followed you around to annoy you on a regular basis.

Taking a bite of treacle tart, Draco looked over to Roisin. "What about you? Tell us about the mysterious O'Conner clan."

Roisin rolled her eyes. "If I told you then we wouldn't be mysterious, would we? My father's a squib, much to everyone's shame and dismay, and so is my brother, but my grandparents and the rest of the clan is all magical. It's completely unheard of for anyone to even marry a non-magical person."

Skirting the truth, but no outright lies. Fionna may have married a muggle-born wizard, but he was still a wizard, and Aunt Lily had been a witch, so perhaps there was a recessive gene there.

An eavesdropping third year leaned over. "I heard Harry Potter on the train, says you're his cousin. What's that about?"

Roisin glared. "Does it matter? I'm my own person, regardless of family connections. I don't need his fame to prove anything!"

A fourth year had also been listening in, and grinned at her. "Hey, it's all good. Be a credit to Slytherin House and no one will care who you are related to." The fourth year glared at Draco Malfoy, who had the beginnings of a sneer on his face. "Right, everyone?"

Whether they agreed or not, nobody found it important enough to press the issue, especially with an older student, and conversation turned to more mundane topics.

As the pudding also disappeared, Dumbledore rose to his feet again. The hall fell silent. "Ahem. Now that we are all fed and watered, I have a few announcements to make. First years should take note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils, as should some of our older students."

His eyes flickered to the Gryffindor table. A pair of red-head twins tried and failed to look innocent.

"I have also been asked by the caretaker to remind you that no magic is to be used in the corridors between classes."

Dumbledore continued on to something about Quidditch trials as Roisin shared a glance with Desdemona. She gave it a day at most before most of Hogwarts was breaking that rule.

Her amusement was cut short at Dumbledore's next announcement. "And finally, I must inform you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right hand side is off-limits to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death."

A few of the students on the other tables laughed. Everyone else just exchanged confused or slightly worried looks.

Dumbledore dropped most of his seriousness now, smiling brightly. "And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!"

Dumbledore's smile may have been genuine, but the other teacher's smiles became rather fixed. Roisin could have sworn that some of them actually paled.

A long ribbon shot out of Dumbledore's wand, twisting itself into words. "Now, everyone pick your favorite tune, and off we go!"

The song was very un-co-coordinated, with everyone singing at different speeds and finishing at different times. Several of the older Slytherin students remained stubbornly silent.

Finally, only the Gryffindor twins were left, singing to a very slow funeral march. Roisin thought that it might very well be their funeral march if they didn't shut up soon. Indeed, the teachers were among those who clapped the loudest when they finished, and promptly ordered the students off to bed.

The two fifth year prefects led the Slytherin first years out of the hall to their dormitories. Sleepily, Roisin noticed that they were heading down into the dungeons.

Arriving at what looked like a blank stretch of wall, the female prefect called out to them. "Listen up, all of you," (Pansy jerked awake from where she had been dozing on Millicent's shoulder.) "To get into the Common Room, you will need to know the password. It changes every week, and you will be informed every Monday of the new one."

Turning to the wall, the male prefect spoke. "Discretion over valor."

The wall slid aside before their eyes, revealing a large room decorated in green and silver. The students walked in, looking around at the decorations. The female prefect called for their attention once more. "Normally, there would be an orientation speech, but I think

that can wait until morning. Girls follow me, boys go with Tiberius, and we'll show you to your dorms."

She led the girls down a corridor while the boys disappeared down another. Arriving at a door labeled 'First Years', she opened the door to a large and tastefully decorated room with four large beds. Ushering them inside, she pointed to their trunks, stashed against one of the walls. "You can pick your own bed. You can unpack tomorrow, so go to sleep. I'll see all of you in the morning."

Choosing a bed close to the window, Roisin pulled out her nightgown and quickly changed, then fell straight into bed. The other girls did much the same, not even bothering to mumble a goodnight.

Closing her eyes, Roisin immediately headed off to the land of dreams.

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You've spent however long reading this, (yes, that means you, I checked my hit counter) I'm sure you can spend another ten seconds to leave a review.

Seriously, tell me what you think. Does it need to be improved? How? Constructive criticism is appreciated, but flames will be laughed at.

Thanks!
Nathalia.

Disclaimer: See previous chapters.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the aforementioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

A/N: It took me two tries to get the timetable right, as my computer apparently won't accept document tables on ff.n. If anyone is confused, this should clear it up.

Chapter Six

Roisin was woken up the next morning by a loud 'squee' of delight. Mentally planning something nasty if Desdemona didn't shut up, Roisin threw back the covers and got out of bed.

Desdemona was standing by the window, looking out. "Hey, guys, you have got to come see this!"

The source of her delight became obvious, and Roisin was forced to agree. Their dormitory was apparently cut into the cliff itself, and the window opened onto a spectacular view of the lake and surrounding landscape.

They were drawn back into the room by a knock on the door. The fifth year prefect from the night before poked her head in. "Hey. You've got the Orientation Meeting in the common room in half an hour. Get cleaned up and get down there."

Collecting her uniform and a change of underwear, Roisin took the chance to look around the room. It was spacious, and well laid out. One wall had the door that connected them to the rest of the house and two bookcases for books and other school supplies. Nearby were a table and several chairs. The wall with the window and the one facing it had two beds each, Roisin and Desdemona on the wall with the window. Each bed had a small wardrobe and draws/vanity on one side, between the bed and the wall. The last wall had a door that connected to a large bathroom.

Grabbing her toiletries and going into the bathroom, Roisin blinked in surprise. Expecting something like the communal bathroom in the motel where she had stayed on the run from the Hogwarts letters, she was amazed to see three showers and a large bathtub, along with four sink-and-cupboards. It looked sort of like four separate bathrooms merged into one. Two more doors were marked 'WC'.

Catching Roisin's expression, Pansy grinned. "Some of the Slytherin Alumina made a complaint about living standards a couple of years ago, something about how miserable dungeon conditions. So, they made a big donation to renovate the bathrooms and now we have this."

Remembering the Orientation, the four girls quickly showered, brushed their teeth, and changed. Running down to the common room, they arrived a few seconds before the boys.

The Orientation was fairly simple, consisting mainly of introducing the prefects (the sixth year prefects would be showing them to their first lesson of each class.) and a basic run-down of the Do's and Don'ts of Slytherin. Do be a credit to your House, Do Not get caught breaking rules (feel free to break them, just don't get caught) Do stick together. Slytherins stand up with each other, because it is unlikely that anyone else will. Do Not show weakness or friction where any other House might see, and so on.

They were also introduced to their Head of House, Professor Snape, who Desdemona had pointed out at the feast last night.

Professor Snape was a tall man, with dark hair and sallow skin. His voice was low and intense, almost hypnotic as he fixed them with his dark eyes. "Welcome to Slytherin. I trust that you will all be a credit to your house. If you are ever in need of assistance, your prefects are here. If you have a problem that you believe may be too big for them, my door will always be open."

However intimidating Professor Snape's appearance may have been, his words rang true. The professor's eyes narrowed slightly as he looked over the room, pausing momentarily here and there. "Despite popular opinion, Slytherin is not a breeding ground for dark wizards. Slytherin is the house for those who wish to rise above expected limitations, to be all that they can be. Blood does matter, yes, but

ability matters more. If I catch any of you harassing another Slytherin on basis of origin or bloodline, there will be trouble.

Because of misrepresentation, other houses will discriminate against you. You are likely to hear derogatory generalizations about Slytherin House. Avoid confrontations while other teachers are about, but do not be afraid to defend yourselves if need be. If I don't hear about it, then it didn't happen.

Breakfast will be starting soon, so I suggest that you make your way to the Great Hall. You have a full day of classes ahead of you."

The sixth-year prefects led the way up to the Great Hall and Breakfast. While the fare was not as spectacular as last night's feast, it was still some of the best Roisin had ever tasted.

Roisin spotted Harry over at Gryffindor table, still looking a bit tired, and waved. Harry lifted a hand slightly in return, but the red-head next to him shot her a nasty look. Desdemona leaned over to whisper in Roisin's ear, "Ignore the Weasley boy. Probably just upset about a 'slimy Slytherin' being friends with a noble Gryffindor."

Desdemona's expression of overly exaggerated aloofness sent the rest of the first years into a fit of giggles.

About half way through the meal, weekly class schedules were handed out. Roisin and the other first-years could barely wait to get started, although the prefects warned them that the novelty of it would wear off somewhere in the first few weeks. The prefects obviously didn't know Desdemona; Roisin doubted that anything would manage to dampen her enthusiasm.

Roisin glanced at her schedule. Term started on a Wednesday, which made it slightly confusing, but it wasn't too bad.

Monday

9:00 – 10:30

Herbology

10:40 – 12:10

Charms

1:10 – 2:40

Potions

2:50 – 4:20

Transfiguration

Tuesday

9:00 – 10:30

Potions

10:40 – 12:10

Defence

1:10 – 2:40

Astronomy (Theory)

Midnight- 2:00

Astronomy (Prac)

Wednesday

9:00 – 10:30

History of Magic

10:40 – 12:10

Defence

1:10 – 2:40

Herbology

2:50 – 4:20

Charms

Thursday

9:00 – 10:30

Transfiguration

10:40 – 12:10

Transfiguration

1:10 – 2:40

Defence

2:50 – 4:20

Charms

Friday

9:00 – 11:30

Potions

11:40 - 1:10

Herbology

-

The subjects were fascinating. Astronomy was held at midnight at the top of the tallest tower. Roisin and most of her friends thought this profoundly unfair, as they had to actually get up the next morning, but as Blaise pointed out, they could always make up for it in History of Magic, which was their first subject the next day.

Most of their classes were taught along with another house. For example, Herbology would be held with Ravenclaw, Transfiguration with Hufflepuff, and Potions with Gryffindor. Roisin had a Very Bad Feeling about the last one.

While the subjects themselves sounded fascinating, actually navigating the castle to reach the classrooms was nowhere near as fun. Because of the location of the class and size of the castle, ten minutes was given between classes to actually get there. Roisin had thought this very strange at first, but had discovered the reason right after her first class.

There were over a hundred different staircases in Hogwarts, and half of them had a trick step or two, some even changing position on random days. There were doors that refused to open without a password, or were hidden behind a tapestry, or led somewhere different on a Tuesday. To complicate things even more, none of the portraits stayed in one place, Roisin was sure that some of the suits of armour could move, and the statues/paintings/etc that could give directions, frequently refused to.

Admittedly, however, it could have been worse. The prefects showed them around, and the Slytherin Ghost, called the Bloody Baron, kept Peeves the Poltergeist away from them.

Peeves's mission in un-life seemed to be causing trouble and mayhem in the most obnoxious way possible. As Harry complained to Roisin during one of their shared classes, the Poltergeist "was worth two locked doors and a trick staircase."

The classes were defiantly worth it though. Herbology was taught by a witch called Professor Sprout, where they learned about the various plants and fungi and their different uses. Pansy and a few of the other first-years (mostly girls but also Draco and a few boys) wailed about dirt on their robes, but Roisin thought it was wonderful.

Charms was taught by a tiny wizard by the name of Professor Flitwick. He was so short that he had to stand on a stack of books to see over the desk. Nevertheless, he knew what he was doing, even if he was a bit excitable.

Transfiguration was taught by Professor McGonagall, who quickly proved Roisin's first impression correct: She was not a woman to mess with. As soon as they had sat down, she started with a stern lecture about how Transfiguration was a serious subject and should be taken seriously. Anyone fooling around would leave and would not be coming back.

Professor McGonagall changed her desk into a pig and back again, and then set them to taking a lot of complicated notes. Finally, they were all given a matchstick and set to work trying to turn it into a needle. Roisin managed to get the stick and the lump of beeswax to turn smooth, but at the end of the lesson, only Blaise, Theo and Susan Bones from Hufflepuff had made any noticeable difference to their needles.

In Astronomy, they had two separate classrooms. Theory was held on Tuesday afternoon, then Practical at midnight at the top of the tallest tower. Roisin and most of her friends thought this profoundly unfair, as they had to actually get up the next morning, but as Blaise

pointed out, they could always make up for it in History of Magic, which was their first subject the next day.

Blaise was right. History of Magic was even more boring than listening to Roisin's father talk about work at the end of the day. Even the students who didn't have Astronomy the night before tended to sleep through it, and simply studied the material out of the text book.

Defence against the Dark Arts was an amazing let-down. Roisin had seen Professor Quirrel at the Leaky Cauldron, but had been too busy fighting the crowd to actually meet him. Therefore, the first-years had entered full of excitement, eagerly wondering what they would learn first... and promptly discovered Professor Quirrel to be a stuttering idiot who seemed to have very little idea what he was doing

What the Slytherins were really looking forward to, however, was Potions.

Potions was taught by Professor Snape, and held with the Gryffindors, which meant that House Rivalry Entertainment was a given.

Rumours flew that Professor Snape favoured Slytherin, but the first-years put little stock in that. Professor Snape was well-liked by the House as a whole, protecting them, never too busy to put down what he was doing to help them when they needed it, with anything from directions to homework.

This was especially appreciated because it seemed that Professor Snape was the only one who would. The other students avoided Slytherin, and the signs were small, but it was obvious that several of the other teachers looked down on Slytherin. As Pansy had summed up: "It's all talk, I think. Even if it is true, if Professor Snape doesn't favour us, who will?"

Whether it was true or not, the first-years were up early, dressed, breakfasted, and lining up outside the potions classroom well before the bell rang.

The Gryffindors seemed un-nerved by the dungeon atmosphere, and especially by the pickled ingredients floating in jars that lined the walls. Roisin and the other Slytherins, whose dorms were in the

dungeons, had no real problem, although Roisin had to admit that some of the things that they would use were a little creepy.

Class was fun, however. Roisin had the sneaking suspicion that Professor Snape had something against Harry, but it could have been as simple as the fact that he had been muttering with Weasley about Professor Snape favouring Slytherin, for all she knew.

Snape started class by calling the register, then a small speech on what they would be doing.

“There will be no foolish wand waving in this class. You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art that is potion making. I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory and even stopper death.” He glared at the class, specifically Gryffindor, “That is if you aren’t as big a bunch of idiots as I usually have to teach.”

A bushy-haired Gryffindor girl who had responded to ‘Hermione Granger’ was bouncing on the edge of her seat, looking almost desperate to prove that she wasn’t an idiot.

The Slytherins were just as eager, but they at least knew not to be so obvious about it. Those with older siblings already knew that Professor Snape chose a student in the first class of every year to ask more advanced questions, and while they were dying to know who it would be, no-one wanted to be singled out and potentially made a fool of in the first lesson.

The unfortunate student turned out to be Harry, who jumped as Professor Snape called on him. “Potter! What would I get if I added powdered root of Asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?”

Roisin mentally ran through the studying that they had done last night. Asphodel was a very pretty flower with several symbolic purposes. Its roots, harvested at the end of the first year, had several uses. In potions, it was most often used as a powerful sleeping agent.

Hermione Granger’s hand shot up, but Professor Snape ignored her as he waited for Harry’s answer. Roisin saw her cousin exchange a confused look with Ron Weasley, who shrugged. “I don’t know, sir.”

The Professor sneered at them, making a comment about fame not being everything. "Let's try again. Where would you look if I asked you to find me a bezoar?"

Roisin had fallen asleep the chapter before that in her potions book, so she waited for the answer, along with most of the class. Hermione looked ready to bounce out of her seat. "I don't know, sir."

Professor Snape's last question was concerning the difference between monkshood and Wolfsbane. Desdemona had been studying that last night, before Millicent had thrown a pillow and told her to turn the light off and go to sleep. Roisin raised an eyebrow at her partner, who whispered that they were the same plant, also going by the name of aconite.

By now, Hermione Granger was actually standing up, stretching her hand as far up as it would go. Roisin shook her head; that was probably one of the worst ways to get Professor Snape's attention, and was more than likely to just annoy him.

Sure enough, Professor Snape sharply told her to sit down, took a point from Gryffindor for Harry's admittedly cheeky response, and gave them the correct answers, which they quickly wrote down.

They were then set to making a simple boil-reducing potion, as Professor Snape moved around the classroom, offering both praise and criticism.

Draco and Theo had just finished stewing their horned slugs, and Roisin and Desdemona were adding half an ounce of frog-spawn to their potion, when acrid green smoke began to fill the air. Coughing, everyone started looking around for the source.

Neville Longbottom, the Gryffindor boy that Roisin had met in Diagon Alley, had somehow managed to melt his partner's cauldron into a twisted blob, and the potion was now seeping slowly across the floor, hissing and eating its way through people's shoes.

Almost immediately, everyone was standing on their chairs, trying to avoid the potion. Furious, Professor Snape rounded on the unfortunate boy, who had been drenched when the cauldron had exploded. "Idiot boy! I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?"

Sitting at the front, Roisin and Desdemona had the clearest path to the door. Practically snarling, Professor Snape directed Roisin to take Neville to the hospital wing. Letting Neville find his own way across the potion-covered floor, Roisin gathered her books and parchment together. Resisting the urge to sigh as Neville tripped over his own feet, Roisin helped the unfortunate boy, now literally covered in boils, out of the dungeons and up to the hospital wing, where she quickly explained what had happened, then hurried back downstairs for Herbology.

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You've spent this long reading it, spare a few more seconds to review.

Nat

Disclaimer: See previous chapters.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the aforementioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

Chapter Seven

Despite the minor disaster of the first potions lesson, life at Hogwarts progressed more or less normally for the next few weeks.

The other first year Slytherins had been rather vague about what had happened after she left the class with Neville to put all the Gryffindors in such a bad mood, but Roisin didn't bother to enquire too deeply. With the House Rivalry as it was, she would probably get a multitude of different accounts, and if she wanted that much of a headache, she could just do an extra-credit Transfiguration essay.

Roisin did notice that Professor Snape was being unusually nasty to the Gryffindors, but then they hadn't been all that polite to the Slytherins, either. Regardless, nothing happened to really stir the waters of everyday school life.

Roisin still kept in close touch with her grandmother, who sent weekly packages and letters, answering any questions that Roisin might have, telling her general news, and mentioning that she wanted Roisin to meet the rest of the Clan over Christmas, although she would need to get permission from Roisin's parents first.

Roisin didn't fool herself into thinking that her parents would be in any way pleased about letting Roisin go and meet any more 'Freaks' than she already knew, much less give permission, and immediately started looking over possible ways to persuade them. She was Slytherin, after all, so if she wanted permission to visit somewhere over the holidays, then she would get it.

Classes went well, aside from Professor Quirril's hopeless incompetence in teaching them Defence against the Dark Arts. The Slytherin First years solved that problem by studying out of their

books and convincing the older years to let them watch and take notes while they practiced curses and Defence-related spells.

All in all, nothing really happened to shake things up until the notices were posted for the first flying lessons of the year. More specifically, which House they would be sharing lessons with.

Gryffindor.

Oh, this promised problems.

On the first day of flying lessons, Roisin woke with an unusual feeling of trepidation.

Sadly, it turned out that this feeling was not unfounded. While Draco Malfoy's family was highly-placed, that did not make him the ruler of Slytherin. Family aside, there was still a pecking order, and unless you were capable of hexing the older years to hell and back, you tried to stay on their good side.

Draco's family had apparently not taught him that while blood did matter in Slytherin; ability, cunning, ambition and subtlety mattered more. Especially when other people knew a lot more than you did and could make you regret mouthing off. Yet another lecture on this by one of the seventh years had put Draco in a sulk, and when his attempt to rile up the Gryffindors at breakfast backfired, that degenerated into a Bad Mood.

It was an unfortunate, but well known fact in Slytherin that when Draco Malfoy was in a Bad Mood, he was likely to do something stupid.

The 'Something Stupid' happened in Flying Lessons.

Malfoy was stretched to the limit when Madam Hooch told him that he had been flying wrong for years and the other Slytherin first years were either exchanging worried looks or keeping a close eye on Draco.

They were granted a short, if highly amusing reprieve, when Ron Weasley's broom jumped up hard enough to whack him in the face,

and then had to concentrate on Madam Hooch as she explained the basics of taking off.

In most classes, students were given a demonstration of what to do. In Flying Lessons, they got an unplanned demonstration of what not to do.

Neville Longbottom panicked, and shot at least thirty feet into the air before losing control and plummeting back down to earth, hitting the ground with a sickening 'crack'.

Roisin supposed that they should at least be thankful that Malfoy waited until Madam Hooch took Neville to the hospital wing, and was thus out of sight and hearing range, before he burst out laughing.

A few of the other Slytherins joined him, although more from lack of original thought (Crabbe and Goyle) or amusement at the Gryffindors' faces (Pansy, Desdemona and Theo) than from actual maliciousness.

The Gryffindor Patil twin, Parvati, glared at the Slytherins, snapping at them to shut up. She blushed slightly when Pansy returned with a sneering remark about liking the unfortunate boy.

Roisin frowned. "Knock it off, Pansy. Why are we sinking to Gryffindor level, anyway? Especially when Hooch is probably sending a teacher to keep an eye on us until she gets back."

This convinced most of the laughing Slytherins to shut up. No one wanted to be compared with the Gryffindors, after all, and no sane person wanted to risk Professor Snape's wrath by being the first to get in major trouble.

Draco, however, just didn't seem to know when to quit.

Neville Longbottom's red globe that he had received at breakfast that morning had fallen out of his pocket when he fell, and was lying on the grass. Draco snatched it up, but before one of the other Slytherin first years could say anything to stop him from making things worse, Harry stepped up to challenge him and try to get it back.

Knowing her cousin's intolerance for taking other people's things (a side-effect of living with Dudley) and beginning to get a grasp on Draco's character, Roisin could only watch as Draco grabbed a broom and shot into the air, closely pursued by Harry.

Roisin buried her head in her hands, not bothering to join the rest of the class in either cheering the two boys on or yelling at them to get down. This was not going to end well.

Her head snapped up again when the cheers turned into horrified gasps. She followed the rest of the class's gaze to where Harry had turned his broomstick into a steep dive, flying after the red ball that Draco had either dropped or thrown.

Blaise winced as Roisin paled and grabbed his arm a bit too tightly, terrified that her cousin was going to be little more than a hole in the Quidditch Pitch. Harry managed to pull his broom up in time, however, and tumbled onto the soft grass.

Blaise managed to steady Roisin as she let out a faint whimper and nearly fell over in relief. Because of this, they both failed to notice Professor McGonagall heading toward the class with all the subtlety of a guided missile.

Despite protests from Weasley and the Patil twin, the Deputy Headmistress marched Harry off, just as Madam Hooch returned. Unfortunately for Draco, Madam Hooch did listen to the Gryffindor's protests, and removed twenty points from Slytherin, along with spending the coming weekend in detention.

This was not going to go down well.

Tuning out the lecture that Draco received from Professor Snape, and the second one from the prefects, Roisin worried herself into a right state until dinner, where she rushed over to the Gryffindor table as soon as she spotted Harry.

Harry assured her that he was not expelled, but remained very close mouthed about what his actual punishment had been. Trying to pry information out of him while ignoring the youngest Weasley glaring holes in her back, Roisin finally gave up and stalked off in a huff.

Excuse her for caring about him going back to the Dursleys for the rest of his life!

Still fuming, and stabbing her food a bit harder than was strictly necessary, Roisin barely noticed Draco's absence until he came over and sat down across from her. "Worried about your cousin, Rosie?"

Roisin shot the blond boy a dark look. "Don't call me Rosie. He's my cousin, and getting expelled means going back to the Muggle World until he reaches the age of majority. Of course I'm worried!"

Draco grinned at her. "He's not expelled over the Broomstick incident this afternoon, if that's what you're worried about. He might get in trouble over the duel we're having in the trophy room tonight, though."

The other Slytherins within hearing range stared at him in disbelief. Millicent said what they were probably all thinking. "Draco, you just got a double lecture about what happened this afternoon. You can't honestly be thinking about breaking curfew tonight as well! You'll be the one expelled this time, along with anyone stupid enough to go with you!"

Scowling at them, Draco stormed out of the Great Hall; presumably back to the Slytherin Common Room, muttering about the Great and Noble house of Malfoy not being scared about going against 'that stupid scar-head'.

Roisin sighed and moved her plate out of the way, before thumping her head onto the table. "I thought Slytherin's were supposed to be intelligent. Are we sure that Draco got put in the right house?"

Blaise leaned over and patted her arm. "We'll figure something out, Roisin, don't worry. Malfoy already looks like enough of an idiot without getting his arse kicked by a Gryffindor."

The plan for stopping Draco turned out to be quite simple.

After a quick word to Professor Snape, who was less than pleased, the first years (Aside from Draco, Crabbe and Goyle) pretended to go upstairs to be, but then snuck back down to hide in the common room.

At half past eleven, Draco and Crabbe stood up and began to make their way out of the concealed wall that hid the Common Room.

At this point, the rest of the year stopped them with the simple act of dog-piling the both of them, performing the full body-bind (recently learned from a fifth-year who helped them in Defence) and dragging them back to the dorms at wand-point.

When a prefect came to investigate the noise, they told the prefect what was going on, and the prefect simply locked all of the first years into their gender-respective rooms, promising to let them out in the morning.

Silently cursing Draco Malfoy to the moon and back, Roisin curled up in her bed. She would ambush Harry the next morning before breakfast, and get the details from him.

Then she'd figure out how much of a hexing Draco deserved, and rant about the whole mess in her next letter to Fionna.

Whatever had happened, it had made Harry and the Weasley boy very jumpy the next morning.

Harry had always been quick on his feet, due to avoiding Dudley and his gang, but they were always somewhat hard to miss, and Roisin would have the element of surprise. This turned out not to be a good thing, as Roisin had barely dragged them into the small room off the Hall, when she found herself at the business end of two wands.

Refusing to look intimidated, regardless of what she actually felt, Roisin glared at the two boys when they noticed it was her and relaxed slightly. "What the hell happened last night? Draco was going on about some kind of duel between you!"

The Weasley boy made a derisive noise. "Malfoy challenged Harry to a duel all right. Then the poncy bastard didn't even show up, did he."

Roisin scowled at him. "Much as I'd like to think otherwise, Draco is legitimate, even if he is an absolute moron. He didn't show because we told the prefects and ambushed him before he could sneak out. But that doesn't answer my question. What the Hell happened?"

Harry sighed and checked that no-one else was listening. “We went to the trophy room and nearly got caught by Filch. We managed to escape, but wound up in the third-floor corridor. Found out why it was forbidden, too. Last time I go near the place.”

The Weasley boy gave her a suspicious look. “Why do you care so much, anyway?”

Roisin glared back. “Because as thick-headed as he occasionally is, I don’t want my cousin expelled. Because Draco has a big mouth and if I didn’t ask you what happened, someone else would, and they wouldn’t be as nice.”

Weasley looked slightly abashed. “Yeah, well, tell anyone about what happened and I’ll hex you.”

Roisin’s wand was out in a flash and pointing at him. “Point that wand at me and I’ll curse you before you can say petrificus. I’ll tell them that you were nearly caught by Filch, but I won’t say anything about the dog. Try to stay out of trouble from now on, will you.”

Putting her wand away, Roisin stalked out of the room and over to the Slytherin table, sitting in between Desdemona and Pansy. Sitting across from her, Millicent raised an eyebrow. “Talking with your cousin? Did you get anything about what happened to them last night?”

Beside her, Draco leaned over eagerly. “Please tell me that they at least got caught by Filch?”

Ignoring him, Roisin addressed her answer to Millie. “They got to the trophy room and waited for about half an hour, but then Filch came sniffing around, so they made a run for it. Nothing drastic. Now will someone tell Draco that next time he cooks up some idiot plan, to make sure it only affects him, and not the rest of us?”

Never the sharpest tool in the potions lab, Goyle obediently relayed this to Draco while the others snickered. Roisin smiled, rolled her eyes, and stole the last pancake.

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You spent this long reading, take a few more seconds to review my work. Yes, that means you! I checked my hit counter, so I know people are reading this.

Give me an honest opinion, not just a 'good job'. Ideas, suggestions, what can be improved! Come on, everyone.

Thanks to everyone,

Disclaimer: See previous chapters.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the aforementioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

Chapter Eight

It took two days for Draco to stop sulking about Harry and Ron not getting caught and expelled.

The rest of the house, however, remained unanimously disinterested in what Draco thought, either sick of listening to him complain, or embarrassed at his plots obvious failure to succeed.

Observation of Harry and Ron, to make sure that they didn't try anything else stupid, hinted that they were not the only ones involved, as Neville Longbottom no longer seemed to want to be anywhere near them, and the annoying muggle-born witch, Hermione Granger, seemed even more annoyed at them than usual.

Roisin had written to Fionna about what she knew of the incident, as it was easier to rant in a letter than to do so in public and be caught.

Fionna had written back with reassurances and a warning to be careful, as there was obviously a lot more going on than met the eye. The letter ended on a lighter note, however, asking how classes were, and if Roisin had received permission to visit her grandmother during the upcoming Christmas holiday.

Roisin was still sorting through ideas for the one most likely to succeed, but intended to put it into motion within the next week or so. It had been somewhat difficult with Desdemona leaning over her shoulder and offering less than helpful suggestions the entire time. A week after the broomstick incident and near-duel, the Slytherin first years came down to breakfast with a cheerful attitude.

One of the older students had finally become fed up with Draco muttering darkly and sulking, and threatened to hex him soundly if he

didn't stop it. Realizing that pushing the issue would be a Bad Idea, Draco had obeyed, leaving a much lighter atmosphere and a hopeful outlook for the coming days.

Sadly, this idea went downhill as the owl post arrived halfway through breakfast.

Roisin was just opening the latest package from her grandmother (sweets and a soft woollen scarf, 'just in case. The winter gets very cold, dear') when six owls, carrying a long, slender package, flew toward the Gryffindor table, landing in front of Harry.

Draco was the first to notice this, as most of the first years had been pre-occupied with laughing at the Ravenclaw table, where two owls had collided with each other and fallen into the porridge bowl, splashing several students. He pointed it out just in time to see another owl swoop in and drop a letter on top of the package.

While he had stopped complaining about Harry and Ron Weasley, Draco was obviously still holding a grudge, as he insisted on going over to find out what it was and if it could be used to get Harry into trouble. None of the other first years particularly cared what was in the package, so they ignored Draco, Crabbe and Goyle as they stood and made a beeline for the Gryffindor table.

Looking up as they left (it was unusual to see Crabbe and Goyle leave the table before the dishes were emptied) Theo shook his head, commenting on how long it would take for Draco to return. Speculating with the other girls about what they could expect for Halloween at Hogwarts, Roisin paid no attention until Draco stormed back to the table, ranting about rules being broken for the famous and Harry receiving a broomstick.

And they were back to listening to Draco complain. Roisin resolved to find out what was going on at the first opportunity, just to shut him up. Her chance came that night when she and Desdemona were combing the Great Hall in search of Desdemona's Charms book, which she had been glancing through at dinner and left behind.

Seeing Harry walk past on the way out of the castle, Roisin and Desdemona left off searching to follow him. The book wasn't going anywhere, if it was even in the Great Hall, and this was too interesting to pass up.

Luckily, Harry failed to notice them as he headed toward the Quidditch Pitch, where he promptly mounted the broom and kicked off, obviously enjoying his new broom.

The two girls were about to go back inside when they had to dive behind the Ravenclaw Stands to avoid being seen by an older boy that one of the Slytherin Prefects had named as Oliver Wood, the fanatical Gryffindor Quidditch Captain. Well, now, wasn't this interesting?

The Charms Book forgotten, they watched as Wood explained the basics of Quidditch and showed Harry the balls and equipment used. After a quick run-through, Wood started throwing golf balls for Harry to catch in mid-air.

Watching them, Roisin frowned. Wood was obviously training Harry to be a seeker for the Gryffindor Quidditch Team, which she thought was rather unfair.

Roisin was hardly above breaking the rules herself, on occasion, but not a school-wide one like this. The Hogwarts acceptance letter had clearly stated that First Years were not allowed to bring broomsticks, and Dumbledore had clearly stated that playing on the team was strictly for Second years and over.

Harry was a good flyer, from what Roisin had seen so far, and the Gryffindor Team was something of a laughing stock as far as Seekers went, but that didn't mean that they should be allowed to break the rules like that.

Scrambling deeper into the shadows as Harry and Wood started to head back inside, Roisin and Desdemona exchanged looks before following them back to the castle, just making it before the doors shut them out.

They decided to retrieve Desdemona's book the next morning, and headed straight for the Slytherin Dungeons. The rest of the house would love to know about this!

The rest of the House did, in fact, want to know about this, even if it did provoke a screaming fit from the Slytherin Captain, Marcus Flint.

While the other students had less extreme reactions, they also agreed that it was unfair, and all six prefects promised that they would see Professor Snape first thing in the morning to complain about it.

It was starting to get late, however, and the first years were ordered off to bed when Millicent began to doze on Theo's shoulder.

Eager to get away from Flint, who was still ranting, the first years obeyed, going to their dorm rooms and falling asleep almost immediately.

Before Roisin knew it, she was reaching the two month mark of her Hogwarts attendance. Hogwarts was already starting to feel more like home than Privet Drive, probably because of the differing atmospheres, and the lessons were becoming more and more interesting now that they had mastered the basics, even if they were slightly harder.

November was coming up fast, and on Halloween morning, she woke to the smell of pumpkin drifting through the halls in preparation for the Halloween feast, which would take place that night.

They laughed quietly at Professor McGonagall's expression when she found the Transfiguration classroom filled with bats and mashed pumpkin, when they had it as a double period first thing in the morning, and the teacher muttered something dark about the Weasley Twins.

Defence was focused on something interesting for once, with Quirrel talking about the Muggle beliefs concerning Halloween and their basis in fact. This included a brief overview of the original celebration of Samhain and how it eventually changed into Halloween.

Better still, in Charms, the last class of the day; Professor Flitwick announced that they would be learning how to make things float. Despite sharing this class with Gryffindor, all of the first years were very excited to be learning this, which they had been dying to start ever since the tiny professor had made Neville Longbottom's toad zoom around the classroom in the first lesson.

They were given a lecture on the proper wand movement and incantation, and then split up into pairs to practice on feathers. Desdemona had been paired with Theo that lesson, leaving Roisin with Blaise.

Everyone was eager to start, but it was a lot more difficult than it looked. All the students were practising hard, but were met with varying degrees of success. A few students were having no success at all, and a Gryffindor that Roisin thought was named Seamus Finnigan managed to set his feather on fire, much to the Slytherin's amusement.

Despite being paired with Hermione Granger, admittedly one of the brainiest students in the year, Ron Weasley was among those who were having little success.

Focusing on getting her feather to move more than a few centimetres, Roisin was forced to duck as he waved his long arms like windmills, voicing the words for the spell a lot louder than Roisin thought was strictly necessary.

Luckily, Hermione Granger intervened before Blaise could do more than mutter something decidedly uncomplimentary about the red-head. Roisin paused in her own attempts at the spell to watch Hermione as Blaise leaned down to whisper in her ear. "What are you doing? You're meant to be practicing, not watching the Granger muggle-born."

Not taking her eyes off Hermione, Roisin whispered back. "She's also one of the smartest in our year. She usually gets things right in the first lesson, so I'm watching how she does it."

Much to Weasley's obvious disgust and Professor Flitwick's obvious delight, Hermione managed to make her feather rise and float about four feet above the desk. Blaise pulled a face at Roisin, but copied her anyway, and soon their feathers were making their tentative way into the air as well.

The corridors were very crowded when they left the class, with every student in the castle rushing to put their books and such away before going to the feast. Pushing their way through the crowd, the Slytherins were surprised to see Hermione Granger shove her way past them in tears.

Roisin felt sorry for the girl, but ultimately decided that it was none of her business and headed down to the Dungeons, and then the Great Hall for the feast with the others, all anticipating something spectacular.

They were not disappointed. The hall was filled with thousands of live bats, which swooped over the tables in large dark clouds, making the candles flicker and enticing a few shrieks when they got too close to a student.

Then the feast appeared on the golden platters, as it had at the Welcoming Feast. Seeing one of the jumpier students at the Ravenclaw table, Theo grabbed a bat that had wandered within reach and threw it at the back of their head, resulting in a piercing shriek.

Roisin joined in the laughter as she reached for the peas, only to drop the spoon when Quirrel burst into the Hall, shrieking about a Troll in the Dungeons, and then collapsed in a dead faint.

The hall erupted into chaos as everyone, students and teachers alike, started panicking. It took several loud bangs from Dumbledore's wand to restore even a semblance of order. "Prefects, take your Houses back to the Common Rooms immediately. Teachers, come with me."

Most of Slytherin exchanged horrified looks. Their Common Room was in the Dungeon, exactly where the troll was rumoured to be! What was Dumbledore thinking? One of the prefects tried to point this

out, but received an icy look from the remaining Professors and an order to do as they were told.

A second year burst into tears of fright and several others didn't look far from doing the same themselves. Demetera, the female fifth year prefect, managed to calm her down while the seventh year prefects restored order. "It's all right, everyone. Calm down and stay together, we will go to the library until the teachers get rid of the Troll. If any of the teachers have an issue with that, they can take it up with us and Professor Snape."

Relieved that someone had come up with a workable idea that wasn't likely to result in death or injury, the Slytherins started off. Lingered near the back of the group, they were just reaching a three-way point in the corridor when Roisin froze.

Hermione had not shown up at the feast and therefore didn't know about the troll! Roisin was likely to receive all kinds of hell for it, but someone had to warn her!

Making sure that the Prefect nearest to her was looking the other way, Roisin slipped off to the third-floor girl's bathroom, where Hermione was supposedly hiding.

Dodging a few other small groups of students, Roisin had just reached the third floor when she crashed into Ron and Harry. Ron looked like he was about to demand what she was doing here, but Harry motioned for both of them to be quiet as a truly foul smell hit them and the Troll came into sight. Clapping a hand over her mouth to silence a gasp, Roisin and the two boys hid as the Troll went past.

It turned into a room off the hall, and the three of them snuck up behind it, locking it in. Roisin was just about to keep looking for the Girl's Bathroom, when she saw the sign above the door that they had just locked, and turned white, just as they heard a scream from inside the room.

Exchanging horrified looks, they smashed the door open to see the Troll towering over Hermione, who was trapped against the wall, looking ready to faint.

Harry grabbed a tap that the Troll had apparently smashed off the wall and threw it at the Troll, gaining its attention. "Distract it!"

Roisin threw a stinging hex that Opal, a fourth year, had taught her a few days before. The Troll roared and started lumbering toward her as Ron yelled at it and threw a metal pipe. It turned away from Roisin, giving her and Harry a chance to duck behind and grab Hermione, trying to drag her out. She seemed too scared to move.

Harry's attention was drawn back to Ron, who was cornered with nowhere to go. Wondering just what her cousin hoped to accomplish by jumping on the Troll's back and sticking his wand up it's nose, Roisin pointed her wand at Hermione, practically snarling. "Pull yourself together and move it! Before I leave you to the Troll!"

This seemed to get through to the terrified girl, who finally started to move, skirting their way around the fight against the troll. They had made it half way to the door when Ron managed to knock the Troll out with it's own club, making Roisin offer a prayer of thanks to whatever higher power might be listening, that they had learned the levitation charm.

Her prayer froze mid-thought, however, at the sight of Professors McGonagall, Quirrel and Snape standing in the doorway, obviously drawn by the noise. Roisin was trying to think of a way to explain this that wouldn't result in detention for the rest of her natural life, when she heard Hermione speak up, taking the blame and blatantly lying to a teacher! If this wasn't the wizarding world, and thus somewhat probable, Roisin would be looking around for a flying pig.

As Professor McGonagall spluttered in shock at Hermione's explanation, Professor Snape smoothly cut in. "I will leave you to deal with your students, Minerva. Miss O'Conner, come with me."

Roisin winced, but followed her Head of House. A few corridors out of sight, the Professor stopped, turning to face her. "What did you think you were doing, Miss O'Conner? You were supposed to be in the Common Room with the rest of Slytherin House."

Roisin looked at the floor, not wanting to see the disappointment in her teacher's eyes. "Professor Quirrel said that the Troll was in the dungeons, so the Prefects led us to the library. We were on our way there when I remembered that Hermione Granger hadn't turned up for the Feast, and some of the other students said that she was in the bathroom crying, which meant that she wouldn't have heard about the Troll. She may be a Gryffindor, but I didn't want her to be killed."

Professor Snape's voice was neutral, but at least it wasn't deadly soft or shouting. "May I ask why you didn't tell a prefect or a teacher? Or why you didn't let her own Housemates deal with it? You could have been killed just as easily as the girl."

In hindsight, that did seem like the obvious solution. "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't think, and the teachers were all looking for the Troll. I just thought I had to at least warn Hermione, because she isn't very popular in her own House, and I didn't know if any of them would bother."

Professor Snape let out a long breath. "I don't approve of your rash actions this evening, but I admit that you had good intentions. Twenty points to Slytherin. Now let us collect the rest of the House. I believe that we are finishing the Feast in our Common Rooms, and doubtless your friends will want to know what is going on."

Breathing a sigh of relief that she had got off fairly lightly, Roisin followed the Professor, slipping into the shadows as the rest of the House came out of the library and joining her friends near the centre. Back in the Slytherin Dungeons, the remainder of the Halloween feast was somewhat subdued, as everyone was still somewhat shaken up by the Troll fiasco.

This did not, however, stop them from grabbing Roisin before she made it to the Girl's Dorms, and demanding to know what had happened when she disappeared.

Given little choice but to answer, Roisin stuck with a brief overview of the events, dodging around her reasons for trying to warn Hermione in the first place. She had already received a thorough and eloquent lecture from the Slytherin Prefects, and was in no mood to elaborate

on the night's events. Her housemates could fill the blanks in for themselves, which would make it a lot easier on her all around. Roisin had barely been at Hogwarts for two months, far too short a time to make an enemy of her more extremist Housemates, who would be horrified at the very idea of risking her life to save a 'Mudblood'.

Thankfully, no one pressed the issue, and conversation turned to how the Troll got into the castle in the first place. Desdemona leaned against Theo, who promptly took on a deer-in-headlights expression. "Someone must have let it in, I think. By itself, a Troll wouldn't be smart enough to even unlock the doors, and I overheard Filch say that there were no signs of anything being smashed or broken on the way in."

Pansy scowled. "If someone did let it in, I hope I find out who. There are several things that I would like to do to them."

Draco nodded in agreement. "I'll say. If my father found out who was responsible for this, there would be hell to pay."

An eavesdropping Fifth Year made a derisive sound. "Forget Hell. You've never seen my mum angry. She makes a Chinese Fireball look tame."

Roisin couldn't help but wince at the comparison. While the most tolerant of its own species, the Fireball was one of the most dangerous dragon breeds, ranking just under the Hungarian Horntail. "I don't even want to think about how my grandmother will react. I don't really even want to think about the Troll. I just want to go to sleep and forget about it."

Seizing the chance to get away from Desdemona, Theo agreed. "Me, too. So at the risk of being rude, we will just be on our way."

The adrenaline of the evening's events had worn everyone out, and more than one of their Housemates followed the First Year's example. Safely tucked into bed, Roisin drifted off into a blissfully dreamless sleep.

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Thoughts and suggestions are welcome, and Thanks go to Mystic Archer Horse for her well rounded comments.

Thanks everyone,

Nat

Disclaimer: See previous chapters.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the aforementioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

Chapter Nine

November made its presence known with a vengeance, turning the weather cold enough that the grounds had to be defrosted every morning, and prompting the Slytherin First Years to rush for their prefects and Professor Snape, desperate to learn warming charms.

This had done wonders for them in Potions, as Professor Snape refused to move classrooms, and the dungeons were easily the coldest part of the castle. It became routine to apply one or two warming charms before Potions class, then sit back and watch the Gryffindors shiver over their cauldrons.

Roisin had finally hit on a plan to gain her parent's permission to visit her Grandmother over the holidays. Deciding that simplicity was the way to go, she had left Desdemona laughing and sat down to write them a note.

The note said that she was happy to be visiting Privet Drive over the holidays and that she had received offers to stay at Hogwarts or visit others, naturally, but she didn't think that they would agree, besides she needed permission from her parents, and that she couldn't wait to show them all the amazing things that she had learned.

Borrowing Harry's owl to send the letter, Roisin wondered if she hadn't laid it on a bit thick. It hadn't mattered, however, when she had received a reply at breakfast, stating that she should use the chance to get to know her friends better, and that it would be a marvellous idea to go and visit any one of them.

Reading the note aloud had sent every one of the First Years into gales of laughter.

In other news, the Quidditch season had started, with just as much fanaticism as the football or soccer seasons back in the muggle world.

By all accounts, Marcus Flint, the Slytherin captain, had narrowed his world down to two things: Rant about Gryffindor's new Seeker, while adjusting tactics to accommodate for Harry's actual competence, and drill the Slytherin Quidditch team mercilessly in preparation for the upcoming match against Gryffindor.

Harry was supposed to have been Gryffindor's secret weapon, but word had leaked out, and Gryffindor was supporting their team by being louder and more boisterous than ever. Roisin gave it a few more days before people started throwing hexes.

Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff weren't quite as bad, but still made their support in a very public manner.

Slytherin supported their team in a quieter, but more sensible, way. They helped the team members with schoolwork, as Flint was leaving almost no time outside of practice, and made sure that there was always someone around with a hot drink and warming charms when the team returned, shivering, from training.

The morning of the first Quidditch match dawned very bright and very cold. More than one of the Slytherin Team bore faintly martyred expressions when Flint informed them that they would not be wearing anything that may slow them down in the air, and would thus be playing without scarves or extra layers.

Looking over at the Gryffindor table, Roisin felt a faint stab of sympathy at her cousin's green face, while his friends tried to make him eat something. Whatever they were saying didn't seem to help, as Harry now looked ready to throw up.

Roisin's attention was drawn back to the Slytherin table when Pansy passed her the porridge tureen. Adding milk, honey and a touch of cinnamon, Roisin started eating. There was no reason for her to starve from worry, after all.

At ten thirty, the Quidditch team headed out for the lockers and everyone else rushed back to the Common Room for cloaks and

scarves. Trying to get far enough in Adrian Pucey's (one of the chasers) good books to convince him to teach her a few of the more advanced defence material, the First Years brought along warm clothing for the Quidditch team, who were likely to be freezing after flying at high speeds and great altitude.

At eleven, they were all in the Quidditch stands, along with most of the rest of the school, armed with banners, flags and loud cheering voices.

Madame Hooch blew her whistle, and the players were off!

A Gryffindor boy, Lee Jordan, was commentating with heavy bias, despite being sternly watched by Professor McGonagall. Tuning him out, as he obviously wasn't going to say anything positive about Slytherin, however they played, Roisin focused on what was going on in the game.

Harry was circling far above the other players (a wise move, considering the violence from both sides) as the Quaffle was passed, intercepted and dropped, moving from player to player. Flint nearly scored, but was stopped by an impressive save from Gryffindor Keeper Wood. Gryffindor took the Quaffle and scored the first goal of the match. The Gryffindor stands exploded with cheers. Roisin caught a glimpse of Hagrid, the man who had given her and Harry their letters, sitting with them.

The Fifth Year Slytherin boy prefect, Tiberius, scowled and muttered something rude. Selena, his counterpart, smirked. "Well they do have reason to cheer. The team hasn't won more than a few matches for over seven years now; it stands to reason that they'll be excited."

Slytherin was back in possession, and Adrian Pucey was speeding toward the Gryffindor goalposts when a flash of gold shot past his ear, making him drop the Quaffle as Jordan shouted to potential appearance of the Golden Snitch. Both seekers raced after it and Harry was just pulling ahead when WHAM! Flint had been speeding past with the Quaffle, after scoring when everyone was distracted by the seekers chasing the snitch, and blocked Harry, who had to jerk out of the way to avoid him, giving the snitch time to disappear again.

Madam Hooch ordered a free shot for Gryffindor, bringing the score even again, and the game resumed. Montague had just stolen the Quaffle from Katie Bell when Roisin looked back at Harry for a moment and saw him zigzagging strangely through the other players. That was odd, as only a few seconds before he had been flying high again, and if he had seen the snitch, he would have been flying a lot faster.

Flint was hit hard in the face by a bludger, but still managed to score, bringing the score up to twenty to ten, Gryffindor's way, when Harry's broom gave a sudden lurch and seemed to try and buck him off.

The Slytherins were cheering and no one seemed to have notice until Harry's broom started carrying him higher and higher, jerking around as it went, then spinning into a series of rolls until Harry was thrown off, hanging on by one hand.

Houses aside, Roisin turned white with fear for her cousin's safety as the Gryffindor team tried to reach him, without success. Every time they tried to catch up and reach him, the broom only went higher. Flint took the opportunity to score five times without being noticed.

Flint scored twice more as the Gryffindor players finally resorted to flying lower, hoping to catch him when he fell. Wood noticed the score; (ninety points to twenty) paled, and went back to guarding the hoops. He was still slightly distracted, however, and the Slytherin Chasers were merciless as Harry's broom stopped acting up and he managed to climb back on, before going into a steep dive.

The Slytherin chasers had scored three more times and went for a fourth when Harry suddenly clapped his hand over his mouth as if he was going to be sick. He hit the ground on all fours as Slytherin made one more goal, coughed, and spat something small and golden into his hand. It was the snitch, and the game ended in total confusion. The First Years didn't wait around to hear the official announcement of the scores (Gryffindor wins one hundred and seventy to one hundred and forty) and rushed down to where the Slytherin Team stood, with Flint howling about how swallowing the snitch shouldn't count as catching it.

Leaving her year mates to hand out warmer clothing, Roisin rushed off to where the Gryffindors waited, just in time to see him being led off to Hagrid's hut, accompanied by Weasley and Granger. Frantic to see if Harry was all right, Roisin followed.

She arrived at the hut and burst in without knocking. (She would apologise later) Harry was holding a strong cup of tea the size of a kettle, and talking with the others. Roisin entered just in time to hear Weasley saying "...cursing your broomstick, muttering, wouldn't take his eyes off you."

Roisin ignored that and ran over to where Harry sat, giving him just enough time to put his tea down before launching herself forward and wrapping her arms around him.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him exchange a frantic look with Weasley just as Hagrid spoke, obviously refuting Weasley's statement. Roisin mentally rolled her eyes. Harry had no problems with diving to the ground at break-neck speeds, but panicked when she hugged him. Boys were ridiculous.

Awkwardly patting Roisin's back, Harry looked up at Hagrid. "I found out something about him. He was trying to get past that three-headed dog on Halloween."

Hagrid stared at them. "How'd you know about Fluffy?"

This produced a number of reactions:

Harry and Weasley gaped at him. "Fluffy?"

Hermione looked just as shocked. "That thing has a name?"

Roisin jumped to her feet. "Three-headed dog? You never said anything about that! You just said that you found out why it was forbidden!"

The boys had the grace to look faintly sheepish. Harry was obviously thinking of a somewhat tactful way to reply when Weasley opened his mouth. "Well, you're a Slytherin. It's not like that house is known for being trustworthy."

Jumping to her feet, Roisin glared at the red-haired boy. "Well, Gryffindor is certainly living up to its expectations of biased hot-heads! You know what, never mind. Next time I see my cousin in some life-threatening situation, I'll sit back and ignore whether or not he's still in one piece!"

She stormed out of Hagrid's hut and back to the Slytherin Common Room, fuming. Bloody Weasley! Where did he get off making those kinds of judgements? He'd been at Hogwarts for only as long as she had, and all of his family were in Gryffindor, so their opinions were probably biased as well!

Snapping the password Slytherin Forever (An excitable third-year had been passing by with his friends when the prefects were about to set the week's password, and they couldn't change it again until Monday.) Roisin stalked over to where her friends sat, waiting for her. Seeing the look on her face, they decided not to ask. Draco leaned back. "So, Flint is still complaining about the match."

This statement was punctuated by a loud "He didn't catch it, he nearly swallowed it!" from where the Quidditch team sat, the other six reviewing their performance and listening to Flint rant with one ear.

Millicent didn't bother hiding her amusement at the sight. "It could have been worse, though. I mean, it was a pretty small margin, and it gives us a leg up on points."

Putting Hagrid's hut out of her mind, Roisin smiled and looked back at the Quidditch team. Flint had finally caught on that his team was ignoring the rant and was branching out to complain to anyone within hearing range. Seeing him heading toward the first years, Roisin hastily stood up. "And before Flint gets here, can anyone help me with my Charms essay? I'm stuck on the last three inches."

Not wanting to be caught and forced to listen to Flint ranting Quidditch, the other first years quickly volunteered and hurried up to the girl's dorms. Thankfully, Gender Alarms weren't added until Third Year, so the only problem was the lack of space when crowding nine people into a four person room. Theo started to lean back onto Millicent's bed. Millicent kicked him off. Helping Theo up as the other

boys quickly moved away from the beds, Blaise sent Roisin a curious glance. "Out of curiosity for the next match, is Potter all right? Any idea what had the broom acting like that?"

Roisin shrugged. "Weasly was saying something about someone cursing Harry's broom, and they were telling Hagrid that someone was trying to sneak into the forbidden corridor at Halloween, hence the Troll. I didn't hear any names, though. They also mentioned a Cerberus by the name of Fluffy." She let out a huff of annoyance, "Then Weasly started going on about un-trustworthy Slytherins and I left. Bloody prat."

Desdemona pulled a face. "Gryffindors are all like that. They look at a stereotype and decide that it's the golden rule. Slytherin's are selective about who they trust or give loyalty to, but that doesn't make us any less trustworthy."

To everyone's surprise, it was Draco who put a reassuring hand on her arm. "Blood is important, though, and so is family. I hate Potter, personally, but don't give up on him because of his friends."

This earned him several surprised looks. Pansy smiled at him. "Draco, that was almost profound. This coming from the Pure-blood prince?"

A faint tinge of pink appeared on Draco's cheeks, and he quickly stood up. "Shut up, Pansy. I'm going downstairs to see if Flint has calmed down yet. The rest of you had better get moving before a Prefect finds us."

Roisin smiled faintly. "Thanks, Draco. Now I really do need to get to work on my Charms assignment."

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Yes, I played around with the Quidditch match and scores. Really though, do you honestly think that the Slytherins would stop trying to score after five goals? Or for Wood to stop being a Quidditch fanatic

long enough not to notice when the score started to creep up? “Get the snitch or die trying”, anyone?

Review and give me an opinion or suggestions on what to do next.
Next up, Christmas Holidays!

Thanks, Nathalia

Disclaimer: See previous chapters.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the aforementioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

A/N: My own Grandmother is Irish and I'm taking my knowledge of celebrations from her stories and some of my own research. No offence is meant to anyone of Irish Birth, and I apologise in advance for any offence taken.

Chapter Ten

Term had ended and the Winter holidays had arrived.

Harry was staying at Hogwarts for Christmas (Roisin didn't blame him) along with the Weasley children and a few others, but most of the student population was happily anticipating returning home for three weeks.

Holidays and various celebrations were coming up, trunks were packed, the halls of Hogwarts resonated with carols (and some very rude alternate lyrics from Peeves) and it was in a similar spirit that the students prepared to board the Hogwarts Express.

As few of the older families celebrated Christmas, many having at least one ancestor who suffered a burning or some of the less tolerant aspects of Christianity, the Slytherins rarely exchanged more than simple tokens as Midwinter gifts, usually before leaving Hogwarts.

For Roisin, whose parents had always gone with extravagant and expensive as the theme for presents, this was a large change, if a welcome one, as there was no way she would be able to fit her usual Christmas load into her dormitory, much less her school trunk.

With this in mind, Roisin had chosen her gifts carefully. Harry had grown up virtually without sweets, and as good as wizarding candy was, Harry had a weakness for Mars Bars. This in mind, Roisin had ordered a sweet assortment from one of Dublin's main sweet shops, thrown in several king-sized mars bars, and wrapped it up as his

Christmas gift. His gift would not be received until December 25th, but still.

The other gifts were simple, but well thought out, such as books on a topic of interest, or sweets, or a subscription to Witch Weekly that Pansy had (loudly) been wishing for. It was an unspoken agreement not to let Desdemona near sugar or caffeine if at all possible, but Roisin hoped that she liked her gift of Unusual but Useful Charms That No-one Else Thinks Of. Blaise received a set of Gobstones, which his parents considered a waste of time, but really couldn't expect him to throw away a gift.

Although nothing like what she would have received at Privet Drive, Roisin would never deny loving her gifts. Draco had given her a book on Magical customs and etiquette, claiming that if she was going to be seen with him, Roisin would need to know how to behave. Pansy had hit the blond and told him to stop being a prat.

Blaise had a cousin who did wooden carvings charmed to move, and had given one to each of his year-mates. Pansy, Millicent and Theo had joined forces to give everyone a voucher to their favourite shop. Now all Roisin had to do was actually convince someone to take her to Bookworm's Haven to use it.

Crabbe and Goyle had also pooled resources and gone with the theory of 'give as you would receive' (Draco wondered where they had learned the phrase. Roisin and Millicent hit him)

It was Desdemona's gift, however, that she loved the most. One of the third-years, Amanda Flynn, was very camera-happy, and Desdemona had nagged the poor girl into taking several discreet photos of their little group, copied them, and started a photo album for each.

It was Saturday, December 14th, and Fionna O'Conner-Dursley waited at Platform Nine and three-quarters, counting the minutes until the Hogwarts Express arrived with her Grand-daughter Roisin.

About a third of the way through November, Fionna had received a very important letter from her Grand-daughter.

Fionna had sent several letters to her grandchild, Roisin, about visiting over the Midwinter Holidays and meeting the rest of the O'Conner clan. To do this, however, Roisin would need her parent's permission, and that presented a problem, as Vernon and Petunia Dursley hated magic, and had been decidedly chilly toward her ever since they had found out about Fionna's own magical heritage. Therefore, Roisin would have to be the one to get permission.

The letter that Roisin had just sent enclosed not only signed permission for Roisin to visit others over the holidays, but also a copy of the letter that had persuaded them.

After skimming the letter's contents and laughing, Fionna quickly located her second cousin, the current Head of the Clan, and showed him the letter. Fionna had managed to contain her amusement to some degree, Vernon being her son, after all. Michael O'Conner had no such reservations. After spending several minutes incoherent with mirth, he ordered that the keep be made ready for her arrival in December. Bringing a child into the clan was cause for celebration, after all, not to mention the Midwinter Celebration.

Then again, one did have to remember the old saying; 'No one can celebrate life like the Irish'. The O'Conner Clan took this saying to heart, and celebrated whenever a reasonable opportunity presented itself.

"Reasonable Opportunity" could be anything from a good spring rain to a wedding, but the most important ones were occasions when someone was brought into the Clan, such as a birth or marriage, and the Solstice and Equinox celebrations. Like many of the older families, especially those who could trace back to the Witch Burnings, the O'Conner's ignored Christmas and Easter, and instead celebrated Wren Day on December 26, and the four Great Festivals of the year: Imbolc, Beltaine, Lughnasadh and Samhain.

Three of these four holidays would take place during the school terms, but the students usually held their own little celebrations or, if the holiday fell on a weekend, port keyed home for the celebration.

Fionna was shaken out of her thoughts when the Hogwarts Express pulled into the station, and students started to pour out, running to meet their families. Looking around, Fionna spotted Roisin with a small knot of other First Years, waving goodbye as they separated.

Hugging her granddaughter, Fionna twisted the Claddagh ring on her first finger, activating the charm that would bring them to the O'Conner Keep.

The O'Conner Keep, like many others, was actually a large stone Fortress, which served as a refuge in times of Danger and as home to the Ruling family. The rest of the Clan occupied the small village that surrounded the Keep, but it was hard to tell, with the amount of interaction.

People were constantly in and out, and it was impossible to tell who was a resident and who was just visiting. Roisin stayed close to her Grandmother as they walked through the halls to meet the current Head of the Clan.

Roisin didn't really know what she had been expecting, but she was fairly sure that it hadn't included a spacious study and a small group. Michael sat with his wife, Nessa, who had immediately pulled her into a hug and started on how it was wonderful to finally meet her.

Roisin was rescued by sixteen-year-old Aiden, Michael's oldest son, who grinned at her as he carefully extracted Roisin from his mother's arms. The rest of the immediate ruling family was the ten-year-old twins Seamus and Mary, who would be attending Hogwarts next year and could barely wait to start asking questions, and six-year-old Erin, who shyly asked Roisin to help her look for a faery fort at some point during the holiday.

After the initial introductions, Mary and Seamus immediately volunteered to show Roisin to the guest room where she would be staying until she and Fionna could work out a more permanent lodging for the future. The muttering about never having to go back to 'those idiot muggles' did not go un-noticed. Roisin foresaw extreme mothering in the near future.

Roisin started to regret her acceptance of the twin's help about halfway to the guest wing, and wished she had paid more attention to the sympathetic look Aiden had been giving her. Roisin was sure that she had never had this much energy when she was their age, and knew for a fact that the last time she had asked so many questions was when she had discovered the existence of magic.

How many houses were there at Hogwarts? How were you sorted? Where did everyone sleep? What were classes like? Did she have any favourites? What was the castle like? Did they have any activities other than Quidditch?

Roisin mentally added another question: Did these two ever stop talking? Even saying that she needed to unpack didn't get rid of them. Mary opened her trunk, Seamus started taking her non-school clothing out, and they continued asking questions. She nearly cried with relief when Nessa came and shooed them off to get ready for the feast that night.

Fionna had told her about the feast to welcome her into the Clan (and welcome Fionna back), but Roisin still wasn't quite prepared for the celebration in their honour, or the loud cheering when they walked in the door.

It was easily on par with the Hogwarts Welcoming Feast, if not bigger. It was also a lot louder and more raucous, probably to do with a wider age variety, and the presence of alcoholic beverages.

She was originally seated at the head table, but when the music started, everyone abandoned the seating plan to join up with their friends. Roisin was dragged into a group of children around her age, talking and laughing and daring each other to ask someone else to dance.

On December 26th they celebrated Wren Day, where the boys chased down a wren until they caught it or the bird died of exhaustion. The wren was paraded through the streets with the boys singing and asking for donations and handing out feathers for good luck.

The donations were used to hold a dance that night with the wren sitting on top of a pole decorated with ribbons, flowers and wreaths. It

was nearly as much fun as the feast the first night that Roisin had arrived.

The rest of the holidays consisted of getting to know her extended family, especially her wealth of cousins, forming friendships and participating in whatever said friends could think of to pass the time.

Fionna was of the opinion that everyone should know how to ride, and there was no shortage of horses to learn on. Roisin had taken riding lessons when she was younger, when Petunia had thought that she needed a hobby and Roisin had baulked at ballet lessons. The riding lessons had lasted until the horses collapsed whenever Dudley tried to mount one.

After hearing this via eavesdropping, her older cousins and their friends took it upon themselves to take her riding with them on a regular basis. She could also go with younger friends as long as she had an adult accompanying them.

They could also watch the older children practice fighting or duelling. Roisin found the staff-fighting to be quite fascinating, and immediately started watching whenever possible, plotting a response for the next time Dudley tried to hit her with his Smeltings Stick.

A few days after arriving, Roisin had located the extensive library and happily spent hours there, reading her way through the seemingly limitless volumes. Of course, she was usually interrupted about an hour or so in by someone who thought she needed to spend more time in the sun.

Erin and the younger children were always looking for a 'big' person willing to play with them, which was an adventure in and of itself, and if all else failed; she could resort to finding new and different ways to hide from Seamus and Mary when they were in an inquisitive mood.

Her friends from Hogwarts also owed her on a frequent basis, asking about how her holidays were going. Draco wrote about the Yule parties and other functions he attended with his family and complained about being forced to mingle with the 'lower class' children while his father talked business with their parents. Pansy and

Desdemona asked how she was and if there were any cute boys there, said that they were having fun at home and complained about being forced to listen to Draco complain.

Crabbe and Goyle had little to say, as usual, and their letters rarely consisted of more than: 'We are having fun, what about you?'. It was the thought that counted, however.

Blaise had been dragged off to visit his paternal relatives in Italy, but still had a lot of interesting things to talk about. He said that it was annoying that his aunts, uncles and various cousins were constantly going on about his father's questionable judgement in marrying an English witch, but amusing to watch the reaction when his parents and grand-parents overheard. His mother researched spells for the Ministry of Magic, and his father apparently had no qualms about testing them out on his siblings.

Theo and Millicent's holidays were very quiet by comparison, spent at home with parents and immediate family, with the occasional outing. The most notable thing that had occurred with them was the occasional spell gone wrong at Theo's house and Millicent's cousin tripping over the rug and accidentally setting the tree on fire as they were starting to add the candle decorations.

All too soon, the holidays were over, and Roisin found herself packing her trunk (again with help from the twins, who had come up with more last-minute questions.) and saying goodbye to everyone before port keying back to England and spending the night in London before boarding the Hogwarts Express back to school.

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: I am so, so sorry about the lack of updates lately. Unfortunately, my teachers decided that the end of term was a wonderful time to spring any number of last minute tests and assignments. My Support

Physical Development teacher gave us a test that counts for thirty percent of our overall grade on the last day of term. Sadist.

Anyway, I've been swamped with schoolwork, with two more assignments due on the first day back, but I should have more time for writing. I also added a few one-shots. Go look them up.

I have 98 hits for the last chapter alone and only 2 reviews. So, as always, Review and tell me what you think.

Thanks,
Nathalia.

Disclaimer: See previous chapters.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the aforementioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family

Chapter Eleven

The train-ride back to Hogwarts was rather boring, and consisted mainly of repeating the events of the holidays that they had already written each other about, keeping Desdemona sitting in one spot, and mentally cursing whoever had given her the sugar laced coffee that she had been drinking when they had arrived on the platform.

They went from the station to the castle in horseless carriages this time, and there was no feast to welcome everyone back. There was a rather loud shriek from the Gryffindor table, drawing everyone's attention to where Hermione Granger was scolding Harry and Ron Weasley about something. (Millicent, who had been closer, mentioned hearing what sounded like: "If you were caught!") Roisin tried to feel sympathetic for her cousin's plight, but eventually gave up in the face of amusement.

Term started the next day, and it was back to studying. Potions was as fun as ever, although it probably would have been even more enjoyable if Neville Longbottom didn't manage to ruin a potion or blow something up every few lessons.

Also, Quidditch practice had started again. Furious at the defeat by Gryffindor, Flint had turned into an absolute madman as far as Quidditch was concerned. He had gone to Madam Hooch the instant term had started and booked every time slot she would let him have. The first years were convinced that the only reason the Slytherin team wasn't training every second out of class was that Gryffindor Captain Wood was apparently on the same wavelength as Flint about the upcoming Gryffindor/ Hufflepuff match and booked nearly as many practices as he did.

It was enough to make even Draco start to re-consider trying out for Quidditch next term. Roisin just felt sorry for Harry. Constant pouring rain had replaced the snow, and neither captain seemed to

understand that not everyone was as fanatic about Quidditch as they were, and that the School Nurse was running out of Pepper-up potions.

Roisin had never been very interested in sports, and as Slytherin wasn't playing that match, saw no real reason to watch. She was sure to get a minutely detailed account from at least one of her housemates anyway, so why waste time? She had a book to finish and a mail order to Bookworm's Haven to send. Paying little attention to the few others who also followed her train of thought, Roisin selected a large chair near the fireplace and curled up with her book.

Roisin had just closed Deltora Quest: the Lake of Tears when the rest of the house returned. Turning around to greet her year mates, Roisin nearly dropped her book at the magnificent black eye that Draco had gained at some point since she saw him last. She was about to ask what had happened when Pansy caught her eye with a Please-Gods-Don't-Mention-It look, and Blaise mouthed 'I'll explain later.'

Roisin settled for a sympathetic expression and asked how the game had gone. This earned a large amount of dark muttering, until Blaise rolled his eyes and took her aside to explain.

It seemed that Snape had somehow been chosen to referee the game (how this had happened, no-one had any idea) but Gryffindor had still managed to win in less than ten minutes. This put Gryffindor in first place for the cup, and Slytherin in a towering bad mood.

Draco's black eye had been gained when he had been taunting Ron Weasley and the boy had snapped, punching him in the eye and starting a brawl. Crabbe and Goyle had joined in, which only made things even more chaotic.

Weasley had gained a possibly broken nose for his efforts, but the real surprise was that Neville Longbottom had somehow gained the courageous stupidity so common to Gryffindors, and joined in against Goyle and Crabbe. Predictably, he was still out cold in the hospital wing.

February came, and the older magical families temporarily ignored House barriers to celebrate Imbolc.

The weather had finally cleared enough for a bonfire celebration, and a number of the older students told the younger ones to ignore the Divination Professor Trelawney, teaching them their own ways of the craft and of seeking omens.

Surprisingly enough, Professor McGonagall offered the use of the Staff Meeting Room for the hearth fire and the female practice of the Bridget Bed. Thanking her, the female students made their brideogs and brought sleeping bags to stay together overnight. They set up candles, and laid out clothing or strips of cloth for the goddess Brigit to bless for luck.

Roisin laid out a long scarf that she would cut in half the next day. With all the trouble Harry had been managing to get himself into so far, not to mention when they returned to Privet Drive at the end of the year, her cousin could use all the luck he could get!

In late February, however, came the build up to exams. Theo and Millicent, the more learning-oriented Slytherin First-Years, had started to drag the others into revision for the upcoming exams, whether they wanted to or not. Draco and Desdemona were decidedly in the 'NOT' category, but in a surprising twist, Crabbe and Goyle threw themselves into revising with unusual vigour. Probably they realized the necessity of good grades to get into Second Year, and were self-aware enough to realize that they needed all the help that they could get.

Sadly, the teachers seemed to be thinking along the same lines as Theo and Millicent, and were piling on a mountain of revision and homework, meaning that although Roisin once again visited her grandmother for the Easter Holidays, she spent most of it cooped up in the Keep library, working her way through all her schoolwork. Thankfully, the library had several resources that Hogwarts did not, leaving Roisin some amount of recreational time.

However bad the Slytherins were suffering, however, they took comfort in the fact that Gryffindor had it even worse. Hermione Granger was even worse than Millicent and Theo, and was hounding the other Gryffindors mercilessly about studying, as they had found out from Seamus Finnigan and Harry, who finally resorted to

'lowering' themselves to spend time with the notoriously anti-muggle-born Slytherins.

Under the pretence of wanting to spend a bit of time with a fellow Irish (Seamus Finnigan) or cousin (Harry), the two boys had practically begged Roisin to hide them from their bookworm housemate, which the Slytherins had found very amusing.

March went by in a blur of studying, with a slight pause to celebrate Millicent and Roisin's birthday. Millicent's birthday was on March 13th, Roisin's on the 22nd. The first years split the difference and celebrated on March 17th. Pansy had given them both a charm bracelet, and Desdemona had bought them two charms each: a miniture book and a pair of clasped hands. The boys had banded together to buy Millicent a large bottle of the latest perfume, and Roisin a beautifully carved wooden music box that changed tunes with the owners mood. They took the evening off from studying and Crabbe and Goyle produced a birthday cake from the kitchens.

The next day it was back to studying, and Roisin's music box played a slow, mournful lament.

One day only a few weeks before exams, the Slytherins were just returning from Herbology when Draco came running up behind them, closely followed by Crabbe and Goyle. This in itself was worthy of attention, as Draco had always considered running to be beneath a Malfoy's dignity.

The news that Draco carried, however, was of even more note. According to Draco, Groundkeeper Hagrid had somehow acquired a dragon egg that was due to hatch that very day. This sparked all sorts of conversation, from disbelief to shock that such a thing could be allowed.

Pansy was convinced that there must be some mistake, and Theo backed her up, saying that there was no way the Groundskeeper possessed the brains or discretion needed to keep a dragon under wraps. Draco insisted that he knew what he heard, with Crabbe and Goyle as witnesses. Blaise and Millicent suggested that maybe the people Draco had overheard were wrong, because a dragon at

Hogwarts would never be permitted. Desdemona thumped her head in resignation when Draco told them that he had overheard Harry, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger talking about it, arguably the only people in Hogwarts close enough to Hagrid to actually know if it was true or not.

Fearing that the conversation was on the edge of turning into an all-out fight, Roisin suggested that they verify the facts by following Harry and Co. next time they visited Hagrid. Asking one of them flat out would be useless, partly because they were Slytherins and therefore automatically suspected of being up to no good, but mostly because Harry may have been a terrible liar, but he was intensely loyal to those he liked.

Following Harry, Hermione and Ron down to Hagrid's after class proved easier than expected, which re-enforced Draco's story. Harry's knack for avoiding Dudley and Ron Weasley's probable sense for trouble from growing up with the Weasley Twins would usually have made them much more aware of their surroundings and that they were being followed. Crabbe and Goyle were not known for their subtlety.

Peeking through the window while the others hid nearby, Draco relayed the going-ons in a whisper. "They're sitting around a table, and what looks like a big rock is sitting on it. The egg is wobbling and cracking and... oh, bloody hell."

Mixed replies of "Draco, Language!" and "What is it?" were met with an almost shaky response. "I told you it was a dragon egg. The man has a bloody Norwegian Ridgeback! Damn! They've seen me, let's get out of here."

Over the next week, Draco had derived what many would consider an unseemly amount of pleasure by smirking at the Gryffindor Trio whenever he saw them. The Slytherins hadn't told anyone, largely because they doubted anyone would believe them, but also because that would mean having to relay how they knew about it. Besides, as Roisin pointed out, dragons grew like weeds, so how long could Hagrid actually keep the thing a secret?

As if the load of schoolwork and the mess with the dragon wasn't enough, Wednesday the week after that brought even more trouble.

Neville Longbottom had been forced to re-make the previous day's potion as he was in severe danger of failing, and still managed to mess it up, unfortunately just as Roisin and Blaise were coming to ask Professor Snape a question about the potions essay they were working on.

Entering first, Roisin had barely made it two steps into the classroom when Neville's cauldron exploded, covering her with gunk. Blaise immediately escorted her back out of the classroom with Professor Snape's offer of an extension and made a beeline for the Hospital Wing, listening to Professor Snape shouting at Neville.

The failed potion was cleaned off easily enough, but the Nurse, Madam Pomfrey, insisted on keeping Roisin overnight, just in case any unexpected side effects appeared. Blaise and Desdemona reappeared to join her for dinner and bring her the class work she had been working on, but left shortly after.

Thursday morning saw Roisin in a foul mood. The potion had caused her to break out in a rash late last night, and she was stuck in the Hospital Wing until at least lunchtime so Madam Pomfrey could figure out the cure.

Things brightened slightly about half an hour before she was finally able to make her escape. Madam Pomfrey insisted that she have someone come up to escort her back to the Common Room, just in case, and Desdemona was just entering the room to wait with Roisin when she was nearly bowled over by Ron Weasley, who appeared in something of a rush. The reason why was quickly obvious. The red-head's hand was swollen to nearly twice its normal size, and turned a rather violent shade of purple.

Supposedly checking the rest of the room to see if Roisin had missed any of her assignments or notes that she had worked on while in the Hospital Wing, the two girls listened in as Weasley told Madam Pomfrey that he had been bitten by a dog. This prompted the girls to exchange an incredulous look. The only dog at Hogwarts belonged to Hagrid, and no boarhound could cause that sort of effect, no matter how hard they bit you.

Madam Pomfrey obviously came to the same conclusion, if her disbelieving expression was anything to go by, but she let Roisin go

before they could stick around and find out more. Deciding that someone else would have to come up with an excuse to find out what was going on, the girls headed back to the Slytherin Common Room to tell the others what was going on.

Hearing the news, Draco immediately rushed out to visit the Hospital Wing, under the pretence of borrowing a book. No one was under any delusions that he really just wanted to laugh at Weasley's misfortune. The news he returned with, however, was worth it.

Ron Weasley's brother Charlie had written him a letter, saying that he would come to collect the dragon that Saturday at midnight.

The news was priceless, but Roisin just wanted to go to her dorm and regain the sleep that she had missed the previous night. Leaving her year mates to discuss whether to tell a teacher or to ambush the Gryffindors themselves, she went upstairs and told them to call her when they had to go to afternoon classes.

Roisin never did get around to asking what the final verdict had been, but it became all too clear on Sunday morning, when they arrived for breakfast and walked past the hourglasses that showed the number of House points. Twenty of Slytherin's emeralds had been lost between last night and this morning, but Gryffindor had lost over a third of the shining rubies that represented their House points!

Belatedly realizing that they were blocking the doorway, the First Years quickly made their way to the Slytherin Table. Sitting down and helping herself to scrambled eggs and fruit, Roisin looked at her friends. "Okay, how the heck did Gryffindor manage to lose over a hundred points in one night?"

Draco pulled a face. "I wanted to catch Potter and his friends with the dragon, but McGonagall caught me. Slapped me with detention and took twenty points. Filch caught Potter, Granger and Longbottom and brought them to her office just as she was finishing a lecture. She yelled at them too, and gave them detention as well. Then went and took fifty points from each of them!"

Roisin winced and took a sip of orange juice. "Ouch. Things are not going to be pretty when the rest of Gryffindor finds out."

Blaise nodded. "Look on the bright side, though. We're back in first place for the House cup."

The others nodded in agreement, spirits lifting. Gryffindor's loss was Slytherin's gain, after all. Then a pair of Sixth Years walked past them, moaning about how exams were hell and they didn't even want to think about the NEWTs next year. The First Years exchanged looks. Back to studying it was.

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A/N: Ok, you've made me resort to something I swore I would never do. Reviews are a good thing. They tell me what I am doing right, what readers would like to see more of, and point out any inconsistencies or things I am doing wrong.

I've seen how many hits this story has, and I know that not everyone reading it is doing so at lightning speed before rushing off somewhere.

Seriously, feedback is appreciated, and I really don't want to have to lower myself to begging for reviews. You've spent however long reading the story, you can probably spare another thirty seconds to review.

Nathalia.

Summary: We have all read the whole 'Harry/Malfoy/Hermione has a sister, yada, yada, yada.' Idea, but what if the aforementioned sister was not a Potter/Malfoy/Granger? What if she was a Dursley? Meet Roisin Dursley. Witch of the family.

Chapter Twelve

Roisin's prediction of what would happen when the details of Gryffindor's lost one hundred and fifty points got out proved to be all too correct.

The three Gryffindors were ostracized by the other three houses, while most of Slytherin took great delight in cheering for them and thanking Harry for the loss of so many Gryffindor points. This only made things worse for Harry, but aside from glaring at the offender, there was really nothing Roisin could do to make her housemates shut up, and had to settle for quiet support.

Even Quidditch, which Roisin knew to be her cousin's favourite part of Hogwarts, had gone downhill for Harry. Flint's Quidditch spies had reported that the rest of the team alternated between ignoring him and referring to him as only 'The Seeker'. While Flint was overjoyed at the rift in the Gryffindor team, Roisin couldn't help but feel sympathetic toward her cousin.

Neville and Hermione didn't have it quite as bad, but still suffered. Hermione had even stopped drawing attention to herself in class. Roisin really didn't see how that was supposed to help, although it was hard to miss several of the First Years from every house cheering that they could finally get a word in whenever a teacher asked a question.

Despite this, the castle atmosphere was rather subdued as they moved into the last week before the exams.

A break in this was when a traumatized Draco came stumbling back from his detention with the Gryffindors and the other Slytherin First Years spent over an hour calming him down and getting the details before he finally managed to fall asleep. Detention in the Forbidden Forest was enough to scare anyone, they all agreed, never mind

seeing a dead unicorn and some kind of cloaked shadow drinking it's blood.

Given this, no one teased Draco when his nightmares continued until the exams, at which point everyone was too busy studying and/or worrying over the results to really dream about anything. A few of the Slytherins could be heard complaining about how they dreamed of being chased by flying textbooks or potion vials shrieking about devouring student brains, but otherwise, everyone was too exhausted to dream.

The night after the last exam, Roisin and Millicent had been volunteered by the others to help some of the older students sneak food from the kitchen for an 'Exams-Are-Over!' party when they ran into something unexpected.

Making their way back to the Common Room, arms laden with treats, they passed the Bloody Baron. Normally silent and sinister, their patron ghost was flushed a pale silver and ranting about Peeves and impudent someones daring to take his name in vain. Deciding not to make things worse by asking, the Slytherins remained silent until the Bloody Baron was out of hearing range and they were back in their Common Room.

Sitting with her friends, Roisin leaned back in her chair and selected a vanilla cupcake. "I wonder what that was about. The other ghosts have too much respect for the Baron to go around impersonating him, and Peeves wouldn't dare."

Draco gave her a puzzled look, swallowed a bite of Treacle Tart, and asked, "What are you on about? What does the Bloody Baron have to do with getting food for a party?"

Roisin and Millicent alternated between each other to explain what they had overheard. The others immediately began speculating what could have caused the Bloody Baron to behave in such an uncharacteristic way, but came up short.

Hearing them, a few of the older students leaned over to join the discussion. "Why would the Baron behave like that? None of us would show such disrespect, and the rest of the students are too intimidated by the bloodstains to try."

The Fifth Year Prefect, Tiberius, came to join them. “Beats me. The only weird thing I heard was that trio of Gryffindor Firsties saying something about a trapdoor and a dog being important.”

Roisin wondered why a trapdoor would be important, then froze as she remembered something Ron Weasley had said months ago, when Draco had challenged Harry.

“We went to the trophy room and nearly got caught by Filch. We managed to escape, but wound up in the third-floor corridor. Found out why it was forbidden, too. Last time I go near the place.”

Then what Harry had mentioned when she found him after that first, disastrous, Quidditch match.

“I found out something about him. He was trying to get past that three-headed dog on Halloween.”

Third-floor corridor. A dog and a trapdoor. Dumbledore’s warning about a very painful death! Roisin went almost as pale as the Bloody Baron’s usual colour. She grabbed Tiberius’s hand. “I need to talk to Professor Snape. It’s an emergency!”

Blaise frowned; the other girls looked concerned, Draco looked even more confused than before. “What’s so urgent, Rosie? You’ve gone pale, are you sure you don’t need Madam Pomfrey?”

It was a mark of how worried Roisin was that she didn’t respond to the despised nickname. She jumped to her feet and rushed out of the Common Room, closely followed by a worried Tiberius. He had no idea what was wrong, but if it managed to get one of the most self composed First Years in such a fluster, it had to be important.

Professor Snape was marking exams when two of his young snakes came bursting into his office. Knowing for a fact that Slytherin House was throwing a party to celebrate the end of the exams and should have no reason to be in his office, he raised an eyebrow. The prefect shrugged, obviously as in the dark as he was. The other student was

Potter's cousin, Roisin. The Potions professor mentally groaned. Something to do with that blasted Potter brat again, he was sure.

Dismissing Tiberius with a wave of his hand, he nodded for Roisin to start talking. The girl started speaking faster than Granger usually did, words tumbling over each other. "The Bloody Baron was ranting about students daring to impersonate him, and Tiberius said that the only strange thing he heard was Harry, Weasley and Hermione saying something about a trapdoor and a dog and I remembered Weasley saying something about accidentally discovering a three-headed dog guarding a trapdoor on the third-floor. So I think they are going up there and I remember Dumbledore saying that anyone who did would die a painful death and I'm not crazy enough to try and stop them myself so I decided to come and ask you..."

Letting the girl stop to breathe, Professor Snape mentally arranged what she had said into comprehensible sentences. The foolish children were going after the Philosopher's Stone! Dumbledore was in London, but he would have to be called and told what was happening before it was too late! With that blasted dog and the Stone at Hogwarts, Dumbledore had at least had the sense to make sure the staff could contact him quickly in case of an emergency. Quickly opening his work diary and pressing a hidden button (Dumbledore had been watching too many muggle spy programs) Professor Snape ushered his panicking student out of the office. "Come, Miss O'Conner. I think we need to talk to the Headmaster. We will wait in his office until he returns."

Almost running in an attempt to keep up with her Head of House, Roisin tried to calm herself down as they made their swift way to the Headmaster's office. Stopping outside a very ugly gargoyle, Professor Snape said, "Sugar Quill" which was obviously the password, as the gargoyle leapt to one side, revealing a staircase that probably lead to the Headmaster's office.

Once inside the office, Professor Snape gently guided his student to a chair and sat her down, then chose another chair for himself while they waited.

After what seemed like an eternity, but was really only a few minutes, the fireplace roared with green flames and Dumbledore stepped out. While still very worried for her cousin, Roisin had forced herself into a somewhat calmer state by now, and made a lot more sense when she explained her concerns to Dumbledore.

With what she considered to be an infuriating calmness, the Headmaster instructed Professor Snape to take Roisin back to the Common Room while he went after Harry and the others.

When under a great deal of stress, a person's moods can change quite rapidly. Given recent events, Roisin quickly went from worry to rage and she was darkly muttering very dire (not to mention physically improbable) suggestions as to what she would inflict on various people if Harry got hurt. Following Professor Snape back down to the dungeons, Roisin rejoined her friends, who instantly bombarded her with questions about what had her so worked up.

Seeing Roisin's obvious distress, Blaise told the others to shut up as they relocated to the First Year Boys dorms, which was slightly larger than the girls, having five occupants instead of four. Sitting down, they coaxed the story out of her. There was really nothing to say without sounding cruel or insensitive, and Desdemona looked ready and more than willing to hit anyone who upset Roisin further. Bidding the boys a quick goodnight, the First Year girls forewent the rest of the party, rallied around Roisin and swept her off to their room for a good calming rest, broken only when Professor Snape arrived an hour or so later to inform her that Harry, Ron and Hermione had been found, mostly unhurt, and were safely confined to the Hospital Wing until Madam Pomfrey let them out. Roisin could visit them tomorrow, he said, but for now she was to get some rest.

Hogwarts was a school, which meant that nothing stayed a secret for very long. The Ravenclaw Patil Twin, although not quite the gossip her sister was, couldn't refrain from asking where Roisin was at breakfast the next day. Roisin was sitting with her cousin and refusing to budge, and the other Slytherin First Years were talking about what might be happening. Not really paying attention to Padma Patil's question, Crabbe accidentally spilled the general beans. Eyes wide, the Ravenclaw twin hurried over to talk to her sister and ask for details. The Gryffindor twin promptly told her best friend, Lavender Brown, who told everyone who would listen that Harry had

disappeared with Ron and Hermione last night and was now in the hospital wing. After that, it didn't take long for people to notice that Professor Quirrel was also absent, and link his disappearance to Harry's current condition, prompting a near-stampede to the Hospital Wing in search of answers.

Unfortunately for the would-be stampeders, Madam Pomfrey was tougher than she looked and extremely protective of her patients. Therefore, she had barred the doors to everyone who was not a patient's family, a member of staff, or genuinely injured, so the school was forced to wait until Hermione and Ron were released later that day.

Roisin had the feeling that they would probably have rather stayed in the Hospital Wing, as they were promptly bombarded with questions as soon as the other students caught sight of them. They refused to say anything, however, and so everyone had to content themselves with speculation and sending get-well-soon gifts.

Roisin spent a week staying in the Hospital Wing every spare moment she had, and had to be literally dragged out of the Hospital Wing for curfew, classes and meals. She was joined in this by Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, and temporarily joined forces with them to beat off Oliver Wood when he tried to retrieve his Seeker for the match against Ravenclaw.

The Gryffindor Team were slaughtered by Ravenclaw, who beat out Hufflepuff for second place in the House Cup, much to Slytherin's delight. Roisin was even happier a day or two after the match, when she walked into the Hospital Wing to see Harry awake and trying to beg Madam Pomfrey to let him have visitors. The Matron was nice, but very strict, and it took him several minutes, while Roisin, Hermione and Ron listened at the keyhole, to talk her into letting them have five minutes.

Hermione beat Roisin to Harry's bedside, but thought better of hugging him back into unconsciousness, to Harry's obvious relief. Instead they sat down and listened to the events that had lead to Harry's week-long unconscious stay in the Hospital Wing. Roisin had dragged the other details out of Hermione and Ron earlier, about how

they had discovered that the Philosopher's Stone was hidden at Hogwarts, how they thought Professor Snape was trying to steal it to bring Voldemort back, and the various trials they went through trying to retrieve the Stone before the culprit did.

Roisin had a few choice words over that, regarding both their idea of who was trying to steal it and Dumbledore's idea of defence, if three first years could get past so easily.

Listening to the rest of the story from Harry, Roisin had several more less than polite comments, this time including why they tried to go up against a Dark Lord by themselves (so what if Dumbledore wasn't there, why didn't they drag Flitwick or someone with them?) and how Voldemort had managed to go un-noticed for the entire year.

She was prevented from continuing, however, by Madam Pomfrey's declaration that they had had fifteen minutes and they would either leave willingly, now, or she would throw them out herself.

The day after that was the Hogwarts Leaving Feast, and while Ravenclaw may have won the Quidditch Cup, Slytherin had held the House cup for the eighth year running. Several Ravenclaws had been heard complaining about 'Slimy Slytherins' and 'almost had it'. Said Slytherins promptly informed the irate Ravenclaws not only where to take their complaints, but also what to do with them when they got there. Professor Flitwick had overheard and taken points for their language, which Professor Snape had restored ten minutes later for 'creativity and inventive thinking'.

So it was with great pride that the Slytherins entered the Great Hall to find it decorated in green, with the silver Serpent motif on the banners. Gryffindor Table was in a decided sulk, obviously under the impression that they should have been rewarded for Harry, Hermione and Ron's actions. A few Ravenclaws had taken their bad mood out by saying that if they were going to be rewarded, they would have been given points before now. This had nearly caused an all out brawl, but someone had spotted a professor and the two Houses had decided that it really wasn't worth it.

Roisin smiled in relief as she saw Harry enter, then in amusement as the entire Hall went completely still. It was mean of her, but Harry's face was priceless as he made his way to the Gryffindor table.

Luckily, Dumbledore entered only a few moments later, and attention turned from Harry to Dumbledore's speech. Roisin waited for her Houses cheers to die down as Dumbledore announced them as the winners of the House Cup. The smiles faded slightly, however, when Dumbledore continued, saying that there were some last minute points to hand out.

"First, to Mister Ronald Weasley, for the best-played game of chess Hogwarts has seen in many years, I award Gryffindor fifty points."

Ron Weasley looked like a radish with a bad sunburn as Gryffindor burst into cheers. Several Slytherins looked at each other in disbelief. Fifty points for a game of chess? If that wasn't favouritism, they didn't know what was, and they had an excellent education about favouritism from their own Head of House!

"Second, to Miss Hermione Granger, for the use of cool logic in the face of danger, I award Gryffindor fifty points."

Hermione looked like she had burst into tears. The Slytherins looked ready to explode. This was just going too far. Even Hufflepuff was looking distinctly put out. Not only had they been overtaken at the last minute, but their sense of fair play and honesty had to be running around screaming at Dumbledore's reasoning for the extra points.

"Third, to Mister Harry Potter, for pure nerve and outstanding courage, I award Gryffindor sixty points."

The noise was deafening, but Roisin couldn't help think that Dumbledore wasn't doing Gryffindor any lasting favours. Hufflepuff still looked unhappy, and Ravenclaw looked ready to hurt someone. Nerve and Courage (or sheer stupidity, depending on your viewpoint) were supposedly traits of Gryffindor House, and 'third' implied that still more were to be given. Why not give Ravenclaw points for extreme bookishness leading up to exams, or give Hufflepuff a

reward for their hard work and outrage on behalf of everyone, not just themselves?

Slytherin were just as furious. Gryffindor had gained one hundred and sixty points for the most transparent reasons anyone had ever heard (even some of the teachers were looking annoyed) and now they were tied with Slytherin!

Dumbledore raised his hand for quiet, smiling benevolently, and several people around the Hall winced. This promised Violence. "There are all kinds of courage. It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies," (Gryffindor was making all kinds of enemies in the space of only a few minutes) "but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mister Neville Longbottom."

The Great Hall fell into a stunned silence, which was perfectly understandable, as Neville Longbottom had never gained so much as a point for Gryffindor before. Gryffindor House took a deep breath, about to burst into cheers, when an obviously furious Professor Snape stood up.

Professor Snape wasn't the only angry one. If the points had been handed out earlier, fine, but announcing them in the middle of the feast served no real purpose than to seriously piss off Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff and to humiliate Slytherin. Pansy looked ready to cry as Professor Snape spoke. "For common sense in knowing when to seek help, ten points to Miss Roisin O'Conner."

Anyone paying attention could see a look of chagrin on Dumbledore's face, but he couldn't really refute Professor Snape's words without seeming biased. The students were obviously wondering whether they were supposed to cheer or not, as Slytherin and Gryffindor were tied once again, but the Headmaster spoke before things got out of hand. "Since we have a tie, it seems that a slight change in decoration is in order."

He clapped his hands, and half of the green and silver banners were replaced with red and gold. Professors Snape and McGonagall glared

at each other, but shook hands anyway as the Feast appeared on the tables.

Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw Houses maintained something of a frosty demeanour toward Gryffindor, but as they returned home the next day, and Gryffindor had sort of broken their losing streak, it had no real effect.

With everything that had happened, Roisin had almost forgotten that exam results were due back. Hermione Granger had come top of the year (much to any number of people's annoyance) but Roisin and the Slytherins had also scored quite well. Roisin's highest marks had been in Potions and Defence Against the Dark Arts, despite the utterly useless Professor Quirrel.

Then, all of a sudden, their wardrobes were empty, their trunks were packed and Neville Longbottom's toad was found lurking in the Second Year Girls toilet (how it got there was a mystery), located by following the screams and thrown at the boy's head when they next saw him.

Notices were handed out informing the students that they were not allowed to do magic over the holidays. The older Slytherins informed the younger ones that they should borrow their parent's wands if they needed to do magic.

Vernon, Petunia and Dudley didn't know she was forbidden to do magic, and the Keep had a ward around it to make magic detection impossible, so Roisin wasn't overly worried.

Hagrid took the First Years down to the little fleet of boats that sailed across the lake back to the station. They boarded the Hogwarts Express and set off for London, happily discussing what they would do over the Summer Holidays. Fionna had written Roisin and informed her that she would be coming to the O'Conner Keep for Lughnasadh and the remainder of the holidays after that, but until then she would have to put up with Privet Drive.

Being stuck at Privet Drive also meant Hell To Pay at the appearance of anything out of the ordinary. This in mind, Roisin asked her friends to send letters to the O'Conner Keep or wait until the second half of

the holidays to write her. It was hardly an ideal solution, but better than nothing.

All too soon, the Hogwarts Express was pulling into the station, and Roisin was waving goodbye to her friends, promising to keep in touch by owl whenever possible. She was stuck with Muggles for the first half of the holidays, after all.

They crossed the barrier between stations in small groups so as not to attract attention, and Roisin sighed when she and Harry went through, and were met by her parents and Dudley. Harry managed a hasty goodbye to Hermione and the Weasley family before they were dragged off, out of sight of normal people, for what promised to be a long summer...

THE END OF YEAR ONE

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A/N: I know I made Roisin sound like a bit of a Mary-Sue at the feast, but doesn't anyone else think that Dumbledore's announcement was kind of unfair? It embarrassed Slytherin in front of the entire school, and the points could have just as easily been handed out quietly before the feast, rather than getting people's hopes up. The other two houses may have been celebrating the Downfall of Slytherin, but I doubt that they would have been too pleased with the sudden change in house points, either

Anyway, take a few minutes to leave a review, and I welcome suggestions on whether I should make Year Two a separate story, or a continuation of this one.

Nathalia

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter. If I did, I would be holidaying somewhere in the sub-tropics, rather than complaining about sadistic teachers who co-ordinate to make everything due on the same day.

Summary: Roisin is back for her second year, but what will happen with a lousy Defense teacher and a monster that has everyone blaming Slytherin House?

Chapter Thirteen

It was a warm day on July 31st, and Roisin Dursley was daydreaming at the kitchen table, happily counting down the days of summer. Only one more day, and she was out of here to visit her extended family in Ireland.

Despite the volume and the fact that it was happening less than a meter away, Roisin managed to ignore the fight between her parents and her cousin, Harry Potter, over Harry's pet waking them up. Again.

Harry finally gave up the argument and sat back in his seat as Roisin's twin brother, Dudley, belched and demanded more bacon. Roisin pulled a disgusted face as her mother started cooing over him, talking about how she didn't like the sound of the food at Dudley's boarding school.

Roisin barely managed to stifle a noise of disbelief. Her brother was large enough that his bottom draped over both sides of the chair. Dudley didn't need extra nourishment nearly as much as he needed a serious diet. Finally realizing that his sister was calmly ignoring him, Dudley turned to Harry instead. "Pass the frying pan."

Harry glared at him. "You forgot the magic word."

Roisin thumped her head on the table as the rest of the room exploded. Dudley fell off his chair with a crash that shook the entire room. Petunia let out a small scream and covered her mouth. Vernon leapt to his feet, a vein throbbing in his temple. Harry obviously recognized the danger signs, as he quickly tried to explain. "I meant please! I didn't mean..."

It was too late, and Vernon had been set off again, completely ignoring Harry's attempts to protest and explain. "WHAT HAVE I TOLD YOU ABOUT SAYING THE M WORD UNDER OUR ROOF? HOW DARE YOU THREATEN DUDLEY! I WARNED YOU, I WILL NOT TOLERATE MENTION OF YOUR ABNORMALITY IN THIS HOUSE!"

Roisin was looking for a quick and un-noticed route out of the kitchen when Vernon finally calmed down, although he was still very red. Relieved that the danger had passed for at least a short time, Roisin quickly finished her breakfast, hoping to avoid any more 'M-word' related incidents.

In most places, the word 'magic' would bring very little response. Indeed, many parents used it as an enticement to teach their children manners. Number Four Privet Drive, however, was an exception, and with fairly good reason.

Both Harry and Roisin were able to do magic. Not the smoke-and-mirror kind of magic that is performed at parties, but actual, spells-potions-and-enchancements magic. Harry's parents, James Potter and Roisin's Aunt Lily, had been a wizard and witch, but the Dursley family was depressingly normal and as non-magical (the correct term was 'Muggle') as you could get.

The Dursleys hated anything that they considered 'Abnormal', and One had to admit, magic was about as abnormal as you got while still being human.

The exception (and real kicker) to this was Roisin's paternal grandparents, Frank and Fionna O'Conner-Dursley. Frank had been a Muggle-Born Wizard, but Fionna was born and raised the daughter of the purely magical O'Conner Clan in Ireland. Roisin was very thankful that she would be going to visit them the next day, and staying for the rest of the holidays.

Roisin was just about to escape the kitchen and finish packing when her father cleared his throat. "Now as we all know, today is a very important day. It could be the day I make the biggest deal of my career."

Roisin sighed; not this again. For weeks now her father had been going on about a rich couple, the Masons, who worked in Building and were thinking about buying a large shipment of drills. Vernon's drill company, Grunnings, had put Vernon in charge of making a good impression and convincing them to accept Grunnings as the main supplier.

Vernon had decided that the best way to do this was to invite the Masons over for dinner. Roisin thought that this was going to be a disaster. She shook her head as her father continued. "I think we should run through the schedule once more. We should all be in position by eight o'clock. Petunia, you will be - ?"

"In the lounge," Petunia replied promptly, scurrying to the door leading to said area, "Waiting to welcome them graciously into our home."

Roisin raised an eyebrow. The Masons were businesspeople, and if they couldn't see through such an obvious act, then she would do something drastic. Wondering how the other members of her family were going to make this even worse, she started paying attention to what Vernon was saying. "Good, good, and Dudley?"

Roisin watched as her brother forced a simpering smile onto his face. "I'll be waiting at the door. 'May I take your coats, Mr. and Mrs. Mason?'"

Petunia clapped her hands. "They'll absolutely love him!"

Roisin marveled at the wonders of self-denial as Vernon turned to her. "Roisin?"

Oh, so you do remember my name, after all! "I'll be playing the model daughter, quiet and polite, and see what I can say to make you look better."

Vernon looked angry, but couldn't really find anything wrong with her comment. He turned to Harry. "And you?"

Harry sighed and said, tonelessly, "I'll be in my room, making no noise and pretending I don't exist."

He rolled his eyes at Roisin as soon as Vernon's back was turned. Roisin smirked. Gods, what she wouldn't give to be away from here. Even Crabbe and Goyle, two of her friendship group at Hogwarts, would be better company than this, and they were about as slow as molasses.

Vernon was still speaking. "At eight fifteen – "

"I'll announce dinner." Petunia continued.

"Excellent. And Dudley, you'll say –"

"May I escort you to the dining room, Mrs. Mason?" Dudley mimed offering his arm to an invisible woman. Roisin closed her eyes, ignoring Petunia's praise. She was going to have her work cut out for her if she didn't want the Masons to run screaming before dinner was even served.

Vernon continued to outline the doomed strategy. "We should try to get some compliments in before dinner. Any ideas?"

"Vernon tells me you're a wonderful golfer, Mr. Mason... Do tell me where you bought your dress, Mrs. Mason...?"

"How about 'we had to do an essay on our hero at school, Mr. Mason, and I wrote about you.'"

Petunia burst into tears of joy and hugged her son. Roisin barely stopped herself from bursting into tears of despair. You didn't pre-plan compliments like that! How would they know if Mr. Mason even liked golf, or what if Mrs. Mason showed up in a tailored suit? School had ended a month ago, and Vernon had only found out that he would be meeting with the Masons a bit over a fortnight ago. There was no way Dudley's compliment would hold any more water than a sieve, if that much.

Roisin sighed. "Maybe 'Your outfit looks stunning, Mrs. Mason.' Or 'My dad says that you are an excellent businessman, Mr. Mason. What kind of building do you do?'"

Vernon frowned, but didn't comment as he turned back to Harry, who, in Roisin's opinion, got the better half of the bargain. "And you, boy?"

Shooting his apparently desperate cousin a sympathetic look, Harry repeated his previous statement. "I'll be in my room, making no noise and pretending I don't exist."

Roisin quickly schooled her face into a blank mask as Vernon caught the look. Thankfully, he ignored it. "Too right you will. The Masons don't know anything about you and it's going to stay that way. When dinner is over, Petunia and Roisin can take Mrs. Mason back to the lounge for coffee, and I'll bring the topic round to drills. With any luck," (Gods knew that they'd need it, in Roisin's opinion) "I'll have that contract signed and sealed before the News at Ten. We'll be shopping for a holiday home in Majorca this time tomorrow!"

Roisin and Harry chose this point to make an escape as Vernon started on about picking up dinner jackets.

Harry went outside into the sunshine. Roisin went up to her room to find something suitable for a fancy dinner. She had finally selected a pale green dress and black shoes that her grandmother had given her over the Winter Holidays when there was a loud howl from outside.

Looking out the window, she saw her brother running inside, one hand clamped over his bottom, screaming for their mother. It looked like Harry had been taunting Dudley with magic to make the larger boy leave him alone. Petunia didn't look pleased, and Roisin decided to make herself scarce before her mother decided to load her with chores as well.

Retrieving books, quill and parchment from her trunk, Roisin started her Defense Against the Dark Arts assignment for the summer.

At quarter to eight, Roisin had changed and headed downstairs, finding Harry finishing his dinner at top speed and racing upstairs. Dudley and Vernon were in suits and dinner jackets that didn't quite

fit properly, and Petunia wore a salmon cocktail dress and pearls. Luckily, the doorbell rang before Roisin had the chance to comment.

The Masons entered, Mrs. Mason wearing a tailored skirt-and-blouse ensemble, and Dudley said his lines. Roisin closed her book and put it to one side as Petunia ushered the Masons into the lounge room. Following them, Dudley sneered and motioned for her to not say anything and just remain quiet.

Roisin narrowed her eyes at him. The heck she would! Slytherins did not obey orders mindlessly, and if she didn't chip in she was sure that the whole thing was going to be a disaster from start to finish! She didn't plan on doing anything openly to ruin the night, however, (Her family would probably do a fine job without any of her help) and just smiled politely at the Masons before picking up a pen and notebook that had been lying on a side table.

Mr. Mason was already involved in small talk, but Mrs. Mason did not seem the gossiping type, and looked like she was trying to escape Petunia's tales of the neighborhood. Quickly making her way to where Roisin sat, Mrs. Mason joined her. "What is this you're doing, child?"

Roisin looked up and smiled. What a wonderful opportunity. "It's a book report for my school. I have to read and summarize a book, and comment on what I did or didn't like and why. I'm afraid I'm not doing very well on properly wording it, though."

Mrs. Mason smiled back. "Book reports aren't usually too hard. What book are you basing it on?"

Roisin was very tempted to burst into maniacal cackling that witches in storybooks were famed for. The book was a fantasy novel, stuffed full of magic and mythical creatures like dragons and unicorns. This was going to kill her parents. "It's called The Willow Tree's Daughter by Emily Rodda. It starts with a Prince wanting to go on an adventure before he becomes King, and meeting a willow tree dryad. They fall in love and she goes back with him to be his queen. They have a daughter, Betony, but she is really not the normal kind of princess. Betony is half-dryad, so she'd rather work in the garden than dance

or embroider, and she gets into all sorts of adventures, like facing down her sorceress grandmother and falling in love with the Gardener's Boy. Princes come to ask for her hand, and she makes them tend a garden for a year and a day, and marries the Gardener's Boy when they can't do it."

Roisin could see her family struggling not to burst into hysterics, and mentally congratulated herself on a job well done, especially since she was making her plan up as she went along. Mrs. Mason nodded at her explanation. "Well, that sounds like a good start to a summery, now what didn't you like about it?"

Mrs. Mason liked Fantasy books and was focusing her attention on the Freak of the family! Roisin couldn't have come up with something better if she had tried!

It was at this point that they were interrupted by a loud 'thump' and loud yelps from upstairs. Vernon forced a smile and hurried upstairs, mumbling an excuse about Dudley having left the television on by accident. Roisin knew that he was going up to yell at Harry, who really needed to learn subtlety. There were better ways for him to ruin things, and several more that were less likely to get him caught and punished!

Petunia, who had been growing paler by the second, interrupted to announce dinner. Roisin put down her book and followed everyone into the Dining Room, shooting a gleeful smirk at her brother, who scowled.

Dinner was Roast Pork, accompanied by vegetables and oven-roasted potatoes and pumpkin. Desert was displayed on the sideboard, a huge mound of cream and sugared violets that Roisin knew for a fact Petunia had spent hours making.

Conversation continued fairly well, as Petunia obviously couldn't use her 'such a lovely dress' line and Roisin had already used the 'School report' one. Dinner had just been finished and Roisin and Dudley were clearing away the plates as a show of good up-bringing when there was the sound of someone running down the stairs and a loud crash.

Running into the kitchen, they were greeted with the sight of Harry absolutely covered with what had been the cream-and-violet pudding. The Masons were ushered back into the lounge room, leaving Harry to clean up the mess, and Vernon breathed a somewhat-more-obvious-than-he-might-have-hoped sigh of relief, trying to gloss things over.

It was beginning to look like he might actually manage it, and Mr. Mason had actually brought out the contract and started to sign when they were interrupted again, this time by a large owl carrying a letter, which it dropped directly onto Mrs. Mason's lap.

Mrs. Mason let out a piercing scream and ran out, leaving Mr. Mason to inform them that his wife was petrified of birds and demand if they thought this was some kind of joke. They left abruptly and Vernon rounded on Harry, who had entered the room to see what the fuss was about. The letter, as it turned out, was a notification from the Use of Underage Magic Office, reminding Harry that he was forbidden to use magic outside of school and a warning that any further magic would see him expelled from Hogwarts.

Seeing her father advance on Harry with an almost maniacal grin on his face, Roisin decided that this might not be the best time to point out that at least they had signed their half of the contract and left it behind, and made herself scarce.

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A/N: So, first chapter of year two. How am I doing so far? Remember, reviews help me write, and are very much appreciated. Take a few seconds to leave one.

Thanks,

Nathalia.

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter. If I did, I would be holidaying somewhere in the sub-tropics, rather than complaining about sadistic teachers who co-ordinate to make everything due on the same day.

Summary: See previous chapters

Chapter Fourteen

Roisin's portkey to the O'Conner Keep was due to leave at 5 a.m. on August 1st, bringing her to the Keep in time for the Lughnasadh festival. Leaving before anyone in the house was even stirring, Roisin had managed to escape Vernon's wrath for a few days.

Lughnasadh was the celebration of the beginning of the harvest. There were contests of strength and skill, horse riding, and invoking the blessings of the gods to ask for a good harvest.

The celebration was two-fold this year, as one of the older girls who had taken Roisin under her wing was to undergo the Handfasting, or 'Trial Marriage', ceremony to a young man by the name of Sean Muldoon. Another couple, Aislin and Bran, would complete their Handfasting and either leave the union, or become married on a permanent basis.

There had been a few teasing comments about how they could finally get rid of each other, but these were largely ignored. As Seamus had pointed out to Roisin (who had been too glad at escaping more Hogwarts-based questions to protest) the couple was "so in love that it's just silly."

The Lughnasadh festival lasted from the 1st of August to the 2nd and two days after that, disaster struck. While the Clan frowned on relationships with non-magical persons, association was accepted. Unfortunately, some half-blood and the occasional muggle-born friends did not have access to an owl, and so sent messages to a drop-box in a nearby town. The town was visited every few days to collect any mail, and this time a letter for Roisin and Fionna spelled trouble.

Vernon and Petunia had used their status as her legal guardians to instantly send a message to the O'Conner Clan, forbidding Roisin to

stay with her grandmother for the rest of the holidays and return home immediately, regardless of protests.

Inspired by the newfound knowledge that Hogwarts Students were not allowed to do magic during the holidays, Vernon and Petunia ignored the facts that Roisin's highest score had been in potions, a non-wand-waving subject, and that Fionna didn't need magic to be intimidating. Roisin now had an additional cot and Harry in her room, a cat-flap in the door to pass food and water through, and bars on the windows.

This did not a happy arrangement make. Roisin believed her cousin's story about the maniac house-elf, but that didn't make two people squashed into a small bedroom any more pleasant. The house-elf had better hope that she never got her hands on it.

Roisin was so telling her grandmother about this. Money and Power and Influence ruled the Wizarding World. The O'Conner Clan had plenty of the first two, and several of Roisin's friends had family wielding the third. Roisin was a Slytherin to the bone, even if she did have a streak of Hufflepuff loyalty. Slytherins didn't get mad, they got viciously even. The Dursley family was going to suffer for their treatment of her.

There was a consolation, however. Roisin might not have been able to do magic, and Hedwig may have been locked up, but her friends would certainly get worried if she didn't turn up for the train ride back to Hogwarts. Slytherins took care of their own, and staying here for another four weeks might even be worth it to see her family's reaction to Fionna and Professor Snape showing up to find out what happened to her.

The cat-flap opened, shoving two cans of soup through, followed by a cup of water. Roisin sighed; at least the soup was hot this time. Splitting the food with Harry and Hedwig, the two (three?) prisoners watched as the sun went down.

Harry eventually dropped off to sleep, and Roisin was just drifting off when she saw something and bolted upright with a gasp.

Those bloody Weaslys were looking in through the barred windows, rattling them to get Harry's attention!

Harry finally woke up and rushed over to the window, thankfully having the sense to do so quietly. "Ron, what are you doing here?"

The youngest Weasley boy gave Harry a grin that somehow always made Roisin want to hit him. "Rescuing you, of course. Why haven't you been answering my letters? I've asked you to stay about twelve times, and then Dad comes home and says that you received a warning about use of Underage Magic. What happened? You know we're not supposed to do magic outside of school."

Looking out the window to see how Ron had managed to get so high up, Roisin's eyes widened and she sat back down, hard. The idiots had somehow enchanted a car to fly, and had driven it into a Muggle neighborhood! Now they were going on about underage magic?

Harry seemed to be thinking along the same lines as Roisin, staring at the car. "Bit rich coming from you."

Roisin closed her eyes and took a deep breath, unsure if she wanted this to be a hallucination. Escape was a wonderful concept, but escape via flying car? There were so many things that could go wrong that she didn't even want to think about it!

Harry and Ron were still quietly discussing use of Underage Magic and whether or not the car counted. Finally, they got around to the actual point of how Harry was going to get out without using magic. Ron Weasley's answering grin worried her. "Don't worry; you forget who I've got with me."

The feeling of worry getting stronger, Roisin looked out of the window again and fought the urge to whimper. Oh, Gods, he had brought the Weasley Twins!

The advantages were obvious: If anyone could get them out safely, and without using magic, the self-proclaimed (even if the title was well deserved) Pranksters Extraordinaire could.

On the other hand, Slytherins were their main target for pranking at Hogwarts, and nearly every member of the serpent house a healthy wariness for anything those two were involved in, no matter how safe it seemed.

Meanwhile, Harry had tied a rope around the bars and whichever twin was driving had put the car into reverse, ripping the bars right out of the wall. The next room over, Roisin heard her father give a sigh, but thankfully made no other indication that he had heard anything.

The Weasley Twin driving reversed as close to the window as possible, indicating for them to jump in. Neither Roisin nor Harry had any intention of leaving their belongings behind, prompting the Weasleys to climb in through the newly-created hole in the wall, pick the lock, and head down to collect Harry's trunk from the cupboard under the stairs.

Oh, well, any port in a storm. Roisin had convinced Blaise's mother to put a feather-light and a timed shrinking charm on her trunk, and hidden it in her closet as soon as she got home, while her family was busy trying to get Harry's trunk away from him. While the Weasley twins were collecting Harry's trunk from downstairs, Roisin joined Harry in searching the room for anything they might have left behind. Quickly replacing any loose belongings back into her trunk as Harry went to help the twins, she had just straightened up again when they returned and started wrestling Harry's trunk into the car. From her parent's room, Roisin heard her father cough.

Knowing that they were pressed for time, Roisin retrieved her own trunk just as Hedwig let out a loud screech.

This was followed immediately by a shout of "THAT RUDDY OWL!"

Realizing that he had nearly forgotten Hedwig, Harry clambered back inside to fetch his owl, and Roisin took the opportunity to push her trunk into the back seat. There was no way she was staying here any longer than necessary.

The twin in the driver's seat frowned at her. "You're a Slytherin, how do we know you aren't going to rat us out? Get off!"

Roisin ignored him, measuring the distance from the car to the window. It wasn't too much higher, placing the top of the closed door at about the same height as one of the smaller horses that she had ridden while visiting Ireland during the previous holidays. She swung herself into the car, ignoring the glaring twin. "You're Gryffindors, you'll survive. You have nothing I want aside from a lift away from here, so there is no reason for me to go telling."

She probably owed them some kind of Debt, too, but she certainly wasn't going to be the one to bring that up!

Any further argument was cut off as Vernon battered down the door and lunged for Harry, who was half-way back out the window. Vernon grabbed Harry by the ankle. Roisin let out a yelp as Ron Weasley landed on her leg as he and the Twins grabbed Harry's arms, starting a human tug-of-war.

Roisin moved as far away as the limited confines of the car would allow as Vernon yelled for her mother. "Petunia, he's getting away! HE'S GETTING AWAY!"

This brought Petunia and Dudley running just as the Weasleys gave a giant heave and dragged Harry into the car, leaving the rest of the Dursley family hanging out of the window.

Finally getting out of there, the rescuers and escapees settled back for the drive, letting Hedwig out to float on silent wings behind them. Roisin closed her eyes and leaned back, listening with one ear as Harry explained the events that had gotten them into the mess in the first place.

She started paying more attention when one of the Weasley Twins (Roisin had given up trying to keep them separate long ago) asked if it was some kind of prank, but who would want to do something that might get Harry expelled.

Ron and Harry exchanged a look, coming up with an immediate answer. "Draco Malfoy. He hates me."

The other Weasley Twin turned around sharply. “Draco Malfoy? Not Lucius Malfoy’s son?”

Roisin rolled her eyes. With as blood-fanatic as that line traditionally was, there weren’t a whole lot of them, and even if there were, Draco was hardly a commonly used name. Also, regardless of his father’s alleged actions (since she had no hard facts on the matter, Roisin wasn’t really interested in arguing about it), Draco just wasn’t Death Eater Material.

As speculation turned to whether or not the Malfoys even owned a house-elf, Roisin decided it was time to interject. “The Malfoy family is old and rich enough to have dozens of house-elves, but I doubt they sent the wretched thing to you. Draco may be far more impulsive than a Slytherin should, but he would insist on getting you in trouble personally. Draco is my friend and Housemate, but he isn’t nearly subtle enough to pull something like this off.”

The other occupants of the car looked frankly disbelieving, but as the topic had reached a proverbial dead-end, the conversation turned to what the Weasleys had been up to and what had prompted them to come and check on Harry. It turned out that Mr. Weasley, their father, was obsessed with Muggles and had enchanted the car to fly.

“So does your Dad know that you have the car?” Harry finally asked. Roisin rolled her eyes, wasn’t the answer that he certainly didn’t kind of obvious? No parent was going to let a pair of fourteen-year olds drive a flying car without supervision, especially in the middle of the night.

The conversation turned to Mr. Weasley and his job at the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office at the Ministry of Magic. Roisin closed her eyes again and tried to get some amount of sleep.

She was woken again when one of the Twins pointed out the main road. “We should be there in about ten minutes. Just as well, it’s starting to get light.”

There was a faint pinkish glow on the horizon, and Roisin could see a dark patchwork of fields and trees as the driving Twin started to bring the car lower.

They landed with a small bump next to a tumbledown garage in a small yard in front of the Weasley house. Roisin had to give the dwelling credit; it was a far cry from the Dursley residence.

The house looked like it had once been a large stone pigsty, with rooms added on at random intervals until it was several stories high. It had four or five crooked chimneys, and if not for the existence of magic, Roisin was sure it would have collapsed long ago. A lopsided sign proclaimed it 'The Burrow', a jumble of Wellington boots surrounded the front door, and several fat chickens pecked their way across the yard.

It would have given Petunia Dursley a heart attack.

They all got out of the car as the Weasley Twins outlined their plan. "Now we'll all go upstairs really quietly, and then wait until Mum calls us down for breakfast. Then Ron, you'll come bounding downstairs, going 'Hey, Mum, look who turned up during the night!' She'll be so pleased to see Harry and no one need ever know that we flew the car."

Roisin couldn't believe her ears as the Weasley Twins looked pleased with themselves. That was it? Sneak in, pretend Harry had shown up during the night, and hope their mother didn't ask too many questions?

They were talking about a parent, and parents almost always knew if a child had been doing something they shouldn't. Ottery St. Catchpole was nowhere near Little Whinging, how were Harry and Roisin supposed to have made their way here? Why were they here without an invitation or Mr. and Mrs. Weasley's prior knowledge? Roisin had no association with the Weasleys, so why would she be there instead of with family or other school friends?

Things were going to go to Hell in a hand basket, and Roisin was going to be the unfortunate bystander caught in the backlash.

The Weasleys apparently also had a sudden realization that this wouldn't work, as Ron had just turned an interesting shade of green

at the sight of Mrs. Weasley approaching, looking remarkably like a saber-toothed tiger.

Roisin tried to make herself as un-noticeable as possible as Mrs. Weasley reached them, looking from one guilty face to the next. She shook her head as one of the Weasley Twins (Fred, she thought?) tried to calm his mother down in what he obviously hoped was a jaunty, winning voice. It wasn't going to work.

Roisin recognized the soft, dangerous tone in Mrs. Weasley's voice. It was one that Professor Snape used when highly upset about something. "Do you have any idea how worried I've been?"

Roisin winced. Oh, boy, this was not going to be pretty. "Sorry, Mum, but see, we had to-."

The Weasley boys cowered as Mrs. Weasley's wrath washed over them. "Beds empty... No note... Car gone! Could have crashed... Out of my mind with worry... Did you care? Never, as long as I've lived... You wait until your father gets home! We never had trouble like this from Bill or Charlie or Percy..."

The other twin chose that moment to mutter "Perfect Percy."

Roisin winced again. Their mother was in the middle of a rant already, was the idiot trying to make things worse? She was proven right when Mrs. Weasley's voice rose another few octaves. "YOU COULD DO WITH TAKING A LEAF OUT OF PERCY'S BOOK! You could have died! You could have been seen! You could have lost your father his job..."

Parental scoldings always seem to go on longer than they actually do, but even staying out of the line of fire, Roisin thought that it certainly went on a long time. Mrs. Weasley had shouted herself hoarse before she turned to Harry and Roisin. Harry backed away. Roisin looked for the fastest exit.

"Of course I'm very pleased to see you, Harry dear, come inside and have some breakfast. Oh, and who might you be?"

Obviously, Roisin hadn't been mentioned in whatever the Weaslys had told their mother. "Roisin O'Conner, ma'am. Harry's my cousin."

Thankfully, Mrs. Weasley smiled. "My boys never mentioned you, but come and join us anyway."

Perhaps the Weasley Matriarch was more tolerant of House differences than her sons? Roisin certainly hoped so as she followed Mrs. Weasley toward the house and into a small and rather cramped kitchen. Roisin joined Harry at a scrubbed table and looked around. She had seen magical cookbooks, the WWN and things like the clock at the O'Conner Keep (a location clock was invaluable in keeping track of active young family members, Nessa had told her) and smirked at Harry's obvious fascination.

Mrs. Weasley bustled around making breakfast, still muttering about how she couldn't believe her sons had done such a thing, and assuring Harry that of course she didn't blame him.

"It was cloudy, Mum," Fred Weasley insisted, his mouth full.

"Keep your mouth closed while you are eating!" Mrs. Weasley snapped.

"They were starving him, Mum," said George.

"And you!"

Luckily, there was a diversion in the form of a small, red-haired girl in a long nightdress who appeared in the doorway, squealed, and ran out again. Roisin blinked, echoing Harry's quizzical look at the Weasley boys. Ron explained in an undertone, "Ginny. Our sister. She's been talking about you all summer."

Fred snickered. "Yeah, she'll be wanting your autograph." He caught his mother's eye and bent back over his plate. Silence reigned until all of the plates were empty, which took surprisingly little time. Or perhaps not so surprisingly, as the other table occupants were all growing boys.

Fred set down his knife and fork with a yawn. "Blimey, I'm tired. I think I'll go to bed and-."

"You will not!" Mrs. Weasley snapped. "It's your own fault that you've been up all night. You're going to de-gnome the garden for me, they're getting completely out of hand."

Roisin raised an eyebrow as the Weasley boys moaned; surely they hadn't expected to get off that easily? Still, the boys obviously knew better than to complain as they headed out the door to start de-gnoming. Harry was about to follow when Roisin touched his arm, "Harry, you know how you said Hedwig needed exercise..."

Harry grinned. "Yes, you can borrow Hedwig. You know that was nowhere near subtle, right?"

Roisin tossed her hair and smirked, fetching parchment and quill from her trunk, resting with Harry's just inside the door. "Subtlety is wasted on Gryffindors. I need to tell Nana what happened and where we are now. Then I need to send a letter to Desdemona and the others, they'll be freaking out by now."

Harry suddenly looked like he was re-considering letting her use Hedwig. "You're going to send Hedwig to Malfoy?"

Roisin rolled her eyes. The entire school knew about the rivalry between Harry and Draco, she wasn't fool enough to send Harry's owl to Draco, if only because he'd probably ignore it on principle. "No, I'm going to send all of the letters to Desdemona, with a note asking her to distribute them. I'm not sure that Blaise is back from Italy yet, anyway, and I won't send Hedwig that far."

Harry shrugged. "Fine, then. Join us outside when you're done?"

Roisin nodded distractedly, and then started on her letters. The first one was to Fionna.

Dear Nana,

You are probably worried about my lack of communication by now. My parents were more than a little upset about the House-Elf Incident, and confined us to my room, locking Hedwig in her cage.

The Weasley twins broke us out last night, and we are currently at their home, The Burrow, near Ottery St. Catchpole. I have also written my friends with an explanation, but as yet have no current plans for the rest of the summer. I hope to be able to return to the O'Conner Keep, if that is agreeable.

Yours Faithfully

Roisin O'Conner.

The next letter was to Desdemona. Roisin had started to run low on parchment, and decided to send a general letter, trusting her friend to pass it on.

To Desdemona,

First of all, I am so sorry I haven't written until now. There was an incident with some insane house-elf that had Harry being blamed for underage magic and me being dragged back from the Keep for dual confinement and no communication.

I am free now, thankfully, as the Weaslys came to rescue Harry and I joined them before they could protest. I am currently at the Weasley house and have already written Grandmother to get me out of here. The abundance of Gryffindors is killing me.

I am running low on parchment, so could you pass the message onto the others? Is Blaise back from Italy yet? When are you going to Diagon Alley for supplies? Perhaps we could make it a group outing.

I have to go now; paranoia over the Weasley twins in close proximity is setting in. Hopefully I will see you soon.

Yours in Friendship,

Roisin O'Conner.

Folding both letters, Roisin closed them with the personalized seal that Fionna had given her over Lughnasadh. A carved relief of a single rose, surrounded by Latinized Furthrak Runes from the Viking invasion: her name on the top half, and the clan motto 'Constant and True' on the lower half.

Giving the letters to Hedwig, Roisin watched the owl's flight for a few moments, and then headed outside, just in time to duck a badly-aimed gnome.

Straightening up and glaring at her sheepish-looking cousin, Roisin sighed. She really hoped that Hedwig would return soon.

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A/N: Here we have chapter two. Chapter three is in the works and should be up soon.

Unless my two reviewers have read the last chapter an average of thirty times each, I just wanted to remind everyone of the drill: be nice and leave a review.

Nathalia.

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter. If I did, I would be holidaying somewhere in the sub-tropics, rather than complaining about sadistic teachers who co-ordinate to make everything due on the same day.

Summary: Roisin is back for her second year, but what will happen with a lousy Defense teacher and a monster that has everyone blaming Slytherin House?

Chapter Fifteen

If nothing else, life at the Burrow was certainly different to that of Privet Drive or the Keep.

Mrs. Weasley was quite the mother-hen, and nowhere in the house was quiet for very long. Almost everything was very obviously magical, a direct opposition to Privet Drive, where Petunia refused to tolerate anything out of the ordinary, such as running around and loud noises while inside, and even Disney movies like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty were banned, on account of containing magic.

Admittedly, Roisin could name several of the Clan who were just as 'Mother-Hen' as Mrs. Weasley, but they were a bit more discreet about it, rather than loudly fussing over every detail, and there was no way that a mirror would be allowed to yell something like 'fix your hair, scruffy' at the Keep. If you failed to keep up a decent appearance, the teasing from your age group/friends/family/etc. would quickly make you fix the problem, and you seldom made the same mistake twice.

Roisin still harbored a large dose of paranoia concerning the Weasley Twins, especially when loud explosions could be heard from their room, but it was nice to see that they would prank their siblings rather than risk their mother's wrath for pranking a guest. What Roisin found most amusing, was the Weasley girl, Ginny, who had a crush on Harry the size of Hogwarts, if not larger.

The poor girl could barely look at Harry without blushing, and if he paid even the slightest bit of attention to her, even asking her to pass the potatoes at dinner, she would do something like stick her elbow in the butter dish before collecting herself enough to fulfill the request.

It was amusing, but also somewhat annoying. As the only girls in the dwelling, Roisin was temporarily sharing a room with Ginny, and was therefore bombarded with Questions About Harry at every opportunity. It made her long for her cousins, Seamus and Mary. Starting Hogwarts this year, at least their constant questions were mostly limited to that.

Honestly, how was she meant to know what color underwear Harry liked? Or how long he spent in the shower every morning? It didn't do to be rude to One's host, however, so Roisin just tried to avoid Ginny whenever possible.

Fortunately, Roisin did not stay at the Burrow long. The second day there, Roisin, Harry and the Weaslys were eating dinner outside when they were besieged by owls, who dropped their letters in a neat pile next to Roisin, then perched on a nearby bush.

Looking at the Weaslys, who looked somewhat startled, Roisin asked to be excused for a moment. Reading at the table was bad manners, after all.

The first letter was from Fionna, who stated that everyone was worried about her and that she would be arriving at Ottery St Catchpole the very next day. (Friday) Fionna mentioned nothing about her son, daughter-in-law and grandson, but Roisin had a feeling that the Dursleys were in for a lot of trouble.

The second letter was from Desdemona, who started with a long rant on 'those wretched Muggles', her sympathy that she was with the Weaslys, and an offer to get everyone together and do something nasty, then inform her that the group would be meeting at Diagon Alley on the Wednesday the 17th of August (Today was Thursday the 5th), and that she was welcome at Moon Mansion (Desdemona's home) at any time.

The other letters were mostly variants on the same; indignation on her behalf and offers to stay with them.

Blaise was back from Italy, and offered his commiserations on suffering through the presence of blood-relatives. Crabbe and Goyle surprised her, waxing almost eloquent in their outrage for her,

whereas, in a dramatic twist, Draco was reduced to almost incoherent ranting for several paragraphs (apparently using a dictation quill) before calming down. Pansy and Theo were livid, while Millicent was cold and calculating.

The letters were reassuring, and Roisin was smiling by the time she had finished. Dinner was over by then, and while the Weasley children were clearing up, Roisin took the opportunity to inform the Weasley parents that her Grandmother would be arriving the next day to take her home. They had been slightly upset, but accepted her decision to go.

Roisin was bouncing around all of the next day, until Fionna arrived just before lunch.

Roisin ran upstairs to get her trunk, dodging Ginny on the way down, then said good-bye to Harry and thanked the Weasleys for their hospitality. Fionna held out the portkey, and they were off to the Keep.

Staggering slightly as she arrived, Roisin was immediately bowled over by Seamus, Mary and Erin, helped up by Aiden, and hustled off to her room amid fussing by Nessa.

Answering several questions about how she was feeling and assuring Nessa that she was no worse for wear, Roisin smiled. It was good to be home.

The rest of the Holidays progressed fairly normally, and it was with a bright spirit that Roisin and Fionna, accompanied by Nessa, Michael, Seamus and Mary, port keyed to the designated portkey area of Diagon Alley.

Arriving, they were met by Desdemona, who was trying to ignore her own brother, Mercutio and Millicent, who was looking amused at Desdemona's plight. Roisin could sympathize with both. She was likely to have Seamus and Mary following her half the time, and she agreed with Millicent that it was an amusing change to see Desdemona ready to yank her hair out in frustration, a very common reaction with the other students in Slytherin House when dealing with the hyperactive girl.

The three girls would be meeting the rest of their friends outside Gringotts. Millicent's parents had been called into the Ministry on short notice, but had allowed her to go to Diagon Alley anyway, as she would be with her friends.

Leaving the portkey point, they started making their way to Gringotts. They passed a sign about a book-signing in Flourish and Botts, and decided that that would be the last stop, unless they wanted all of the shops to be shut before they managed to fight their way out.

Reaching Gringotts, they met up with the others, and temporarily separated. The Gringotts carts could only hold so many, and the last thing anyone wanted was to be squished with too many people while being driven at break-neck speed by a smirking goblin.

Besides, Desdemona loved high speeds, for some reason, and being confined in a small area with an excited Desdemona was a situation to be avoided.

The O'Connors went together, while Desdemona and Mercutio went with their parents and Millicent, who wore a faintly martyred expression as she was dragged off. Draco went with Crabbe and Goyle, and Pansy and her mother. Draco's father apparently had business in one alley, and then deposited Draco at Gringotts while Lucius went to collect something. He would rejoin them when he returned.

Theo and Blaise also shared a cart with their parents. Theo's mother was pale, and Roisin had the impression that she didn't do well in cart rides.

A very swift cart ride with three stops at separate vaults, and they were back in the lobby. Fionna saw her friend Mrs. Longbottom, and went over to chat. Roisin looked around to see if any of her friends had re-emerged. Michael and Nessa took the twins off for robes and wands and other supplies. They would meet Roisin and Fionna at Flourish and Blotts in an hour and a half.

Theo and Blaise arrived first, and Roisin's suspicions were confirmed. Mrs. Nott looked decidedly green, and Mr. Nott led her to a small café

nearby, leaving the boys to their own devices. The others also re-appeared in short order and they set off down the alley. Pansy's mother had to do a bit of shopping of her own, and Desdemona's parents took Mercutio to buy his own school supplies, leaving the Second Years to their own devices.

The first stop was the Apocathary, to refill potions supplies, and then the Literacy Store, to stock up on quills and parchment. They took a short break at the ice-cream shop, treating themselves to a late-morning snack. With little else to do until they had to meet the others at the Book Shop, the group wandered around, admiring broomsticks and Quidditch equipment, the latest style of robes, some fascinating artifacts in an antique shop, and giving Gambol and Japes a very wide berth when they spotted the Weasley Twins and their friend Lee Jordan stocking up on pranks.

Finally, they met up at the Flourish and Blotts, where they were joined by Draco's father, and Roisin got her first good look at Lucius Malfoy. He looked very much like an older version of Draco, but a lot more dangerous. To those who knew him, Draco was about as terrifying as a wounded Chihuahua.

Looking again at the sign outside the bookstore, Roisin sighed in exasperation, reading it aloud to her friends, all of whom looked equally annoyed.

GILDEROY LOCKHART

Will be signing copies of his autobiography

MAGICAL ME

Today 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Picking up a shopping cauldron, Roisin glanced over her book list again. It didn't take long to locate The Standard Book of Spells, Grade Two, but the rest was just exasperating! She looked over at Millicent, "Tell me again why we have to get the entire series? We can't possibly need seven books for only one class!"

Millicent shrugged. "The new Defense Against The Dark Arts teacher must be one obsessive fan. Mum was in the same class as him, and she says that he was a completely useless ponce with an over-inflated ego."

Draco made a derisive nose, drawing a look of disapproval from his father. "I should say so. I was doing research for my Defense essay over the holidays, and half of it directly contradicts the rubbish that Lockhart is going on about."

Pansy was leafing through one of the books, an incredulous look on her face. "Definitely. He spends more time talking about himself and how great he is than he does explaining how he fought the various monsters!"

They were distracted by a loud commotion as they fought their way through the crowd to the counter. Turning to look, Roisin saw a blond man with un-naturally shiny teeth dragging an obviously very reluctant Harry up to stand near him.

Ignoring Harry's struggles to get away, he started giving a speech about how wonderful he was. Roisin tried to ignore him at first, but started paying attention again when she heard Theo's horrified gasp. "...That he would soon be getting much, much more than my book, Magical Me. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure and pride to announce that, this September, I will be taking up the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!"

The claps and cheers from the crowd managed to drown out the Slytherin girls' collective wail of despair.

The continued fighting their way through the crowd, deliberately knocking over a stack of Lockhart's autobiographies, and had just paid when yet another commotion started up near the entrance. Roisin sighed: Draco and Harry had caught sight of each other and were headed for a confrontation.

Shoving their way back through the crowd, they reached the scene of impending pandemonium just as Arthur Weasley threw himself at Lucius Malfoy, knocking him down and straight into a bookshelf. Hundreds of books tumbled down around them and the area dissolved into chaos. The Weasley Twins were cheering their father on,

more quietly aided by their sister, while the shop assistant and Mrs. Weasley shrieked for them to stop it.

Then Hagrid was wading through the crowd, picking them up like rag-dolls and forcibly separating them. Mr. Weasley had a cut lip, and Mr. Malfoy's eye was swelling spectacularly from where he had been hit by an encyclopedia of something. (Roisin couldn't make out the rest of the title.)

That put a fairly quick end to the shopping trip, unfortunately, and the Second Years were soon splitting up to return to their respective homes. The O'Connors enjoyed a late lunch at the Leaky Cauldron, before making their way back to the Port key area to get back to the Keep.

Waiting in line for a port key, Roisin closed her eyes. Seamus and Mary still hadn't stopped talking about everything they had done and all the spells they wanted to try when they returned home. Roisin resolved to stay out of their way, and warn everyone else that the twins were now considered armed, as well as dangerous to One's continued mental health.

The remainder of the holidays flew by, and before anyone knew it, it was September 1st, and time to go to Hogwarts. Roisin was not in the best of moods, having been woken up in what she considered the ungodly hours of the morning by the twins, who wanted her to help them search for anything they had forgotten. Ignoring her protests that Nessa could just owl anything they had forgotten, Roisin had been dragged out of bed, which had put her in something of a sharp mood.

Finally, they reached Platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$, and Roisin was more than ready to locate her friends, lock the compartment door, and sleep through the train ride. Fionna, Michael and Nessa hugged all three of them, and lamented (as parents will) that they would not see them for Samhain, but it fell on a weekend next year.

Then they were on the train and finding compartments. Thankfully for everyone's sanity, they found the Second Year Slytherin's compartment easily, and Seamus and Mary went off with Desdemona's brother Mercutio. They talked about different things for

an hour or so, mainly comparing homework and what they thought might be in the Second Year Curriculum. The food trolley came by, accompanied by a witch that Roisin thought was far too cheerful for being forced to travel the entire train full of students.

After eating, they settled back down, and despite her best efforts, Roisin fell asleep on Blaise's shoulder.

She woke up about five minutes from the station, leaving her just enough time to pull on her robes and find the twins. Directing them to Hagrid, Roisin joined her friend at the Horseless carriages, looking around for Harry, who Draco had complained about not being around to taunt on the train.

Failing to spot him, Roisin shrugged. Oh well, he had probably just caught one of the carriages before her. She would see him at the feast.

Harry was not at the feast, however, and neither was Ron Weasley, who usually wasn't far away from him. A glance at the fuming Prefect Weasley showed that he had no idea either, and when the last of the students were trickling in, with still no sign of Harry, Roisin decided that enough was enough.

Slipping away from her friends for a few minutes, Roisin made her way to the High Table, specifically Professor Snape. Harry and Professor Snape didn't get along very well, in fact Roisin would go so far as to say they hated each other, but he was one of the few teachers who would actually listen to a Slytherin's concerns.

Professor Snape assured her that he would take care of it, and suggested that Roisin go and rejoin her friends, as the sorting was about to start. Roisin did so, and had just taken her seat when the doors opened and Professor McGonagall led the First Years in.

Understandably, they looked nervous, but mostly tried to pretend otherwise when they saw the Sorting Hat. Roisin wondered what ridiculous story about the Sorting was being spread around this year. Last year had been that they had to wrestle a troll. Hopefully the perpetrator had come up with something more believable this time. Scanning the line to make sure that Seamus and Mary had arrived

safely (those two could find trouble in an empty room) Roisin blinked when she saw the distinctive red hair and freckles of Ginny Weasley. Hm, Roisin hadn't known that she was starting this year.

Professor McGonagall placed a stool and the Sorting Hat in front of the dais where the Head table stood. Glancing at the table, Roisin blinked when she found Professor Snape to be absent. When had he disappeared?

Her attention was returned to the First Years when the Sorting Hat opened its brim and began to sing:

In ages past, when times were bleak,
The four Founders made a vow.
Four great people would leave a mark,
In this school that stands here now.
A thousand years, these walls have stood,
A place for young children to learn,
The power they hold and legends long told,
Great names, themselves, they would earn.
But how to teach? There were not enough
Instructors to teach them all apart.
Four Houses they made, to sort boy and maid,
With traits each held close to their heart.
Gryffindor bold thought Courage was best,
And Valor, and the strength to stand fast.
Such ideals he sought, in the students he taught,
In times gone and ages long past.
Shrewd Slytherin always valued ambition and wiles,
With the wits and will to rise and succeed.

“Ruthless and cunning,” he vowed, “my house will stand proud!”
He and his students would live by this creed.
Clever Ravenclaw thought highly of wisdom,
Of learning and the desire to know.

“Clever and wise,” her eagle still cries,
“This my children will learn as they grow.
Hufflepuff loved loyalty, and fairness in all,
And thought ‘easy’ was worth naught in the end.
“House will be family,” Gentle Hufflepuff claimed,

“Blessed are those who call my children ‘friend’!”
The Founders are gone, but their houses still stand,
And these qualities still each hold as true.
My task it is now, to decide where you go,
Which house will suit each of you best.
Slytherin or Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff or Gryffindor,
Just sit down and let me do the rest.

She paid little attention to the Sorting, listening with half an ear to her friends whispers of who belonged to which family, or speculation on if someone was a half-blood or Muggle-born. A small but very excitable boy by the name of Colin Creevy was sorted into Gryffindor, where one of the older students had to actually hold him down for the rest of the Sorting.

Mercutio went to Ravenclaw, drawing little more than a shrug from Desdemona before she leaned over to pat him on the back. (Ravenclaw table was next to Slytherin) Apparently the Moon family had a long tradition of both Ravenclaw and Slytherin, but didn't particularly mind which one their child was sorted into.

Mary joined Roisin at the Slytherin table with no small amount of relief, but the real surprise was when Seamus went to Gryffindor. Seamus was frequently reckless, and often favored brains over common sense, but Roisin had expected the twins to be together. She clapped for him nevertheless, prompting the shocked Gryffindors to do the same. They weren't about to be shown up by a rotten Slytherin!

Weasley, Ginerva (Roisin and several other snickered, what kind of a name was that?) also went to Gryffindor, to no-ones surprise. Apparently every Weasley in the last several generations had gone to Gryffindor.

The Sorting Hat had just been taken away when Roisin noticed Professor Snape re-enter and say something to Professor McGonagall and Headmaster Dumbledore. Professor McGonagall's mouth went very thin, causing the few that were paying attention to wince, a thin mouth was never a good sign, and she followed him out as Dumbledore stood up to give his speech.

Much of Slytherin House turned to speculation of where Professors Snape and McGonagall had gone and why, only escalating when the Headmaster followed them as soon as he finished speaking.

The three Professors returned about half way through the meal, and Professor Snape gave Roisin a barely perceptible nod. Roisin sighed in relief, Harry was found and safe, although probably in a very large amount of trouble.

Dessert came and went and as the last of the Puddings vanished, Dumbledore stood up again, announcing that it was time to sing the school anthem. Many of the First Years looked eager, but the older students cringed. Mary, who loved singing, gave Roisin a puzzled look, to which Roisin shook her head.

A long ribbon flew out of Dumbledore's wand and twisted into words. Mary lit up and started to sing to the tune of 'The Wild Rover.

Choosing 'The Fields of Athenry' as her own tune, Roisin winced again at the sound of a thousand voices bellowing. Mary had a wonderful voice, but it couldn't compete with the multitude of others who had apparently failed to grasp the concept of carrying a tune. Mercifully, it was over quickly, and Roisin caught a few Seventh Years offering up a prayer of thanks that they would never have to listen to that travesty again. Lucky gits.

Mary and Seamus waved to each other as the First Years were all led away by their prefects, the rest of the Houses following. The path down to the dungeons and the Slytherin Common Room and Dorms seemed longer this year, although it could have been because Peeves had been running around extinguishing torches, which made the going significantly slower.

The password for this week was Purity Above All, and there were several noises of delight and awe as the wall slid aside to reveal the Slytherin Common Room. Stifling yawns, the Second Years and up made their way to the Dorms as the prefects gave the First Years a much abbreviated version of how Slytherin worked, promised to explain the rest at orientation the next morning, and showed them to their Dorm rooms.

Entering her shared room and looking around the familiar setting, Roisin smiled. It was good to be back.

hp

hp

hp

hp

hp

A/N: So, what did everyone think? Was it good? Bad? Average? The Sorting Song was harder than I expected, How did I do?

Anyway, take thirty seconds to leave a review. What do you think should happen next? How will the Slytherins fare in Second Year classes, especially with Lockhart?

Thanks,
Nathalia

Disclaimer: Obviously, I don't own Harry Potter. Do we really have to go through this every time?

Summary: See Previous Chapters.

Chapter Sixteen

Being woken up by a hyperactive Desdemona was amusing once or twice, but got very old very quickly.

For this reason, Roisin tried to be at least awake before Desdemona was, and set her alarm for 6:45. Stumbling into the bathroom, she quickly made for the shower. Once the clock chimed 8:00 in the morning, hot water became a rare commodity. Washing up and brushing her teeth, Roisin walked back into her shared room in time to see Desdemona placing Pansy's alarm, set to go off in thirty seconds, next to the blonde girl's ear.

Deciding to stay out of it, Roisin pulled out her robes and quickly dressed, trying to ignore Pansy screaming at Desdemona and a half-awake Millicent stumbling around. Dodging an irate and badly-aimed pillow, she quickly made her way down to the Common Room.

Professor Snape was there already, and how he managed to look so awake this early in the morning was anyone's guess. Wanting the details of what her danger-prone cousin had managed to do this time, Roisin walked over to ask. "Professor Snape? What happened to Harry and Ron last night?"

Professor Snape sighed. "Your idiot cousin and his red-haired sidekick managed to get their hands on a car that was enchanted to fly and had the bright idea to drive it to Hogwarts when they missed the train. They then crashed into the Whomping Willow on the grounds before managing to sneak inside." He looked at Roisin's expression, "They are quite all right, Miss O'Conner. I wish you would wait for one of your friends to go with you, but you may go and seek Potter out now if you wish."

Roisin smiled. Let the other houses heap scorn and hatred, Slytherin would never regard Professor Snape with anything less than respect

as their protector. "Thank you, Professor. Pansy and Desdemona are having a debate about appropriate waking methods, but should be down on time."

Roisin walked out of the Common Room in a calm and graceful manner. Once outside, her bearing shifted into a determined stride as she made a bee line for Gryffindor Tower. Harry was so going to get it. Reaching a portrait of a fat lady in a pink dress, Roisin folded her arms and leaned back against the wall.

She didn't have to wait long. Harry exited the tower, surrounded by the other boys in his year. The group of five skidded to a halt at the sight of her. Weasley got over his shock first. Roisin wished he would take a few seconds to engage his brain before opening his mouth. "What are you doing here, Slytherin? Come to spy on us? How did you find our Common Room in the first place?"

Roisin gave him a flat look. "In reverse order: You learn a lot by observation, try it sometime, instead of blurting out whatever pops into your head. If I wanted to spy on you, there are far better ways than waiting outside your door for everyone to see. I want to talk to you and Harry about what happened last night."

Harry sighed in resignation. Roisin didn't change her expression, but inwardly smirked. He decided to just tell her and get it over with, which meant that she didn't need to come up with something creative to force it out of him. "You know the barrier to the platform? It sealed itself shut just before we went through. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were stuck on the other side, but we needed to get to Hogwarts, so we took Mr. Weasley's car."

Roisin raised a sardonic eyebrow. "And Hedwig vanished into thin air, did she? You could have just waited for the Weasleys to come back and flooded, or something."

Harry winced. "That's sort of what Professor McGonagall said. We accidentally crashed into the Whomping Willow and got caught by Snape when we were coming in and he brought Dumbledore and McGonagall"

Roisin decided that now was probably not the best time to mention that she had been the one to alert Professor Snape to their absence. "You've probably been scolded enough, then. In that case, I'm glad that you're still in one piece, and I'll see you in whichever class we have together next. I need to get down to breakfast before the others send out a search party and Pansy Kills Desdemona for the wake-up call this morning."

Harry joined her as she started to walk off. His aunt and uncle may have only been disappointed that the Willow hadn't squashed him flat, it was nice to know that Roisin still worried about his safety, and cared enough to find Gryffindor Tower rather than wait to see if he showed up at breakfast.

Ron hesitated for a few seconds, pondering the morality of being seen with a Slytherin, and then hurried after them. Better walking with a Slytherin than sticking around to be caught by Percy.

Reaching the Great Hall, Roisin left Harry at the Gryffindor table, waved at Mary and Seamus, who were blatantly ignoring House Boundaries by sitting together, and re-joined the Slytherin Second Years. Draco looked up a bit too eagerly. "What happened? Are Potter and Weasley in 'more trouble than they can possibly comprehend', like Professor Snape was muttering?"

Roisin buttered a piece of toast. "Pass the eggs please, Vince." Crabbe obediently handed Roisin the plate, "I don't know how much trouble they are in, only that McGonagall and Dumbledore were informed, but if the incoming Howler is any indication, I think we are about to find out."

A raggedy owl flew to the Gryffindor table and crashed, dropping a letter in front of Ron Weasley, who turned pale enough to be seen from two tables over. Several of the surrounding Gryffindors edged away as the envelope began to smoke.

With a look of looming trepidation, Ron opened the Howler, which he immediately dropped as it started shouting loud enough to shake the walls. Most of the Hall clapped their hands over their ears, and a few stragglers who had just entered quickly left. Mrs. Weasley had lost none of her volume, and the Howler only magnified her voice.

“STEALING THE CAR! I WOULDN’T HAVE BEEN SURPRISED IF THEY’D EXPELLED YOU! YOU WAIT TILL I GET HOLD OF YOU, I DON’T SUPPOSE YOU STOPPED TO THINK OF WHAT YOUR FATHER AND I WENT THROUGH WHEN WE FOUND THE CAR WAS GONE!...”

Roisin winced. Yes, she would have been surprised if Mrs. Weasley hadn’t sent something, but couldn’t she have toned it down just a bit?

“ ... LETTER FROM DUMBLEDORE LAST NIGHT, I THOUGHT YOUR FATHER WOULD DIE OF SHAME! WE DIDN’T BRING YOU UP TO BEHAVE LIKE THIS, YOU AND HARRY BOTH COULD HAVE DIED!...”

Roisin winced again. The O’Conner Clan didn’t believe in public embarrassment via Howlers, so the twins had never experienced one. Mary and Seamus had decided that Gryffindor was currently not the best place to be, and both were now clinging to their cousin in shock. Yes, Howlers were enough to scare you badly if you didn’t know what they were, but she wished the twins would loosen the death-grip.

“ ... ABSOLUTELY DISGUSTED! YOUR FATHER’S FACING AN INQUIRY AT WORK, AND IT’S ENTIRELY YOUR FAULT! IF YOU PUT ANOTHER TOE OUT OF LINE WE’LL BRING YOU STRAIGHT HOME!”

Silence fell with a very audible ‘thud’ as the Howler burst into flames and burned to ashes. The twins loosened their grip on Roisin, but made no indication of leaving. A few muffled (and not so muffled) laughs broke out, and conversation in the hall gradually resumed. The Heads of Houses were coming, handing out timetables, assisted by prefects. Seamus was shooed back to Gryffindor to collect his timetable and the Second Years looked to see what they had first. Transfiguration with the Ravenclaws, and McGonagall was probably still in a bad mood from yesterday.

Oh, Well. Best to get it over with quickly. The Second Year Slytherins gathered their belongings and headed off.

Indeed, Professor McGonagall was still in a bad mood, making her even more strict than usual as she gave a lecture on transfiguring beetles into buttons, then set them to work. It was difficult, as the beetles didn't want to be transfigured and kept running around, making them hard to hit. They eventually managed it, though, and even Crabbe and Goyle managed to make their beetles flat and symmetrical, even if they did still have antennae. Roisin had had a small mishap, accidentally turning the beetle into a cloak-clasp, but finally turned her next try into a proper black button.

Theo did the best, smugly producing a decorated brass button that wouldn't have looked out of place on a dress uniform in high society. After Transfiguration was Herbology, again with the Ravenclaws. Walking across the lawn to the greenhouses, Millicent nearly crashed into Padma Patil when she stopped suddenly, pointing to a heavily bandaged Whomping Willow, most of its branches in slings. The laughter quickly died at Professor Sprout's expression, and they entered Greenhouse Three.

Today they worked with Mandrakes, a tufty looking plant with roots that looked like very ugly miniature people, with a cry fatal to any who heard it. As they were only seedlings, the Mandrakes would only knock them out for a few hours, and looked like very ugly infants, screaming at the top of their lungs as they were re-potted.

Thankfully, the students had all been issued with ear-muffs beforehand, although they could have done with less pink-and-fluffy ones, so there were no real problems with re-potting them.

There was a very interesting period when a not - as - intelligent - as - One - might - have - thought Ravenclaw (how Michael Corner made it into the brainy house, no one knew) used the wrong fertilizer, causing the half-potted Mandrake to break free and throw up what looked like some kind of very muddy water and smelled worse than a swamp. After Herbology, the Slytherins quickly made their way down to their dorms, where they dropped off their Transfiguration and Herbology books, quickly showered and changed out of their messed robes, collected all seven Defense Against the Dark Arts books and ran back up to lunch, where Roisin spotted Mary and Seamus braving the Gryffindor table again. Eating as fast as politely possible in the fifteen

minutes they had left, the Slytherins were treated to a sulky looking Ron muttering about a broken wand, trying to ignore the 'I-told-you-so' look coming from Hermione Granger.

Remembering the scene from Flourish and Blotts, and whatever else they knew about Lockhart from their own research, none of the Slytherins were looking forward to Defense, and dawdled as long as possible.

They couldn't delay it forever, though, and eventually dragged themselves up to the Defense classroom, just in time to see Harry being cornered by an excitable-looking Gryffindor First Year with a camera, who was apparently asking if he could have a signed photo of Harry, who looked as though he would rather have another round with the Whomping Willow.

Roisin barely listened to the exchange of taunts between Draco and her cousin anymore, and only sighed in exasperation, slipping inside the classroom just as "Professor" Lockhart came out to make even more of a scene.

The rest of the class came in a few moments later, finally followed by Harry, who was red enough to fry an egg on his face, and Lockhart, who looked as disgustingly cheerful as ever.

Hermione Granger was paying rapt attention, and the other Gryffindor girls were giggling, but the Slytherins tuned Lockhart out as he started talking about all the awards he had won. Next to Roisin, Desdemona was doing an admirable job of restraining herself from pointing out that none of them cared how many times he'd been in Witch Weekly.

They started paying attention again when Lockhart dropped a test paper in front of them, only to stare blankly at the questions on the sheet.

What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favorite colour?

What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition?

What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart's greatest achievement to date?

The questions continued on, over two more sheets of parchment, until number fifty-two: When is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?

The next desk over, Theo and Blaise were making strangled, choking noises. On the other side, Pansy and Millicent wore expressions of pure horror. Roisin narrowed her eyes. If Lockhart wanted a test to see what they thought of him, then that's what she'd give him.

Poking Desdemona with her quill, Roisin started to write. After a quick glance at Roisin's paper, Desdemona did the same, both girls smirking evilly.

What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favorite colour?
I don't know, nor do I care.

What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition?
To eventually move out of his mother's basement, as she is too ashamed to have him around when anyone might see.

What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart's greatest achievement to date?
Managing to walk and talk at the same time, without overloading the few brain cells he actually possesses.

When is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?
April 1st, when someone inflicted him as a cruel joke on the rest of the world, which now has to put up with him. I don't know about him, but my gift that day would be the strongest alcohol I can find, in the hopes of forgetting that he exists.

Behind her, Roisin could hear Draco quietly snickering as he peeked at her answers, then the scratching of his quill as he scribbled down his own.

When the half hour was up, Lockhart collected the papers and rifled through them. His face darkened for a few moments and he shot a

nasty look at Roisin and Desdemona, who were failing miserably at hiding their amusement at his expense. “Miss O’Conner, did you even open your books? My greatest ambition is most certainly not to move out of my parent’s basement,” (this prompted laughter from the Slytherins and even a few Gryffindors.) “And many of you need to take another look at Year with a Yeti. I clearly state that my favorite colour is lilac.”

Roisin went back to ignoring him as he continued talking about their performance as a whole on the test. A ball of paper landed on her desk from Dean Thomas, who was a blossoming artist. It depicted Lockhart on the ground being beaten over the head with a pile of test papers. A distinct likeness of Roisin stood over him victoriously, while a crowd of onlookers, bearing a remarkable resemblance to the rest of their class, cheered her on.

Catching his eye, Roisin grinned, then passed the paper to Desdemona, who clapped both hands over her mouth to stifle uproarious laughter, and threw it to Pansy and Millicent, who were also very obviously amused. Dean returned the grin and whispered to his desk-partner, Seamus Finnigan, who was at risk of going into convulsions of silent laughter.

Attention was drawn back to the front of the class when Lockhart lifted a covered cage onto the desk. “Now, be warned, it is my task to arm you against the foulest creatures known to wizard kind. You may find yourselves facing your worst fears in this room…”

He was cut off by a loud whisper from Blaise, made to carry. “What, you’ve managed to clone yourself?”

Lockhart gave the Italian boy a dark look, to which Blaise retaliated with an impudent grin, and continued. “Know only that no harm can befall you while I am here. All I ask is that you remain calm.”

Seamus Finnigan had stopped laughing now, and Neville Longbottom was cowering in his seat. Theo looked skeptical. Harry was obviously of the opinion that he and Lockhart had very different ideas of the danger levels of these ‘foul creatures’ and ‘worst fears’.

“I must ask you not to scream,” Lockhart said in a low voice, “It might provoke them.”

The Slytherins were holding their breath in anticipation of how Lockhart was going to make an idiot of himself this time. From the size of the cage and the fluttering noise of what sounded like tiny wings, the only possibilities that they could immediately think of were pixies, fairies or doxies, which would only be dangerous if they got loose. Pixies and doxies were vulnerable to hexes and curses, and fairies could be subdued by asking them to act as an ornament.

Roisin smirked. Convincing them to form a crown of fairies and making Ron Weasley wear it would be fun, and highly amusing for any bystanders. Besides, she owed him for the ‘spying Slytherin’ suspicion that morning.

The Slytherins were right, it turned out to be Cornish Pixies. As Seamus Finnigan pointed out, they weren’t exactly dangerous. Lockhart wagged a finger at him. “Don’t be so sure. Devilishly tricky little buggers they can be.”

He looked around the classroom, deflating slightly as the Second Years looked decidedly un-impressed. “Right then,” he said loudly, “Let’s see what you make of them!”

He threw the cage door open. Pandemonium ensued.

The pixies shot in every direction like rockets. Two started to drag Neville Longbottom into the air by his ears. Others shot straight through the window, showering the back row with broken glass. The rest set about trashing the classroom more effectively than the proverbial bull in the china shop.

They grabbed inkbottles and threw them around the room, covering unlucky students with ink. They shredded books and paper and threw pictures and bags out the window. A wastebasket was upended over Lockhart’s head as he shouted for them not to panic. Brandishing his wand, he shouted ‘Peskipisi Pesternomi!’

It did absolutely nothing. A pixie grabbed Lockhart's wand and threw it out the window. Blaise later insisted that he had seen the pixie roll its eyes as Lockhart whimpered and dived under his desk.

Roisin was glad she had left her previous books and notes back in the Slytherin dorms as she ducked a swarm of pixies, then picked up *Voyages with Vampires* and threw it at them. It hit three of the pixies, who dropped to the floor, out cold. The rest grabbed the book and started ripping it apart. Other students started catching on and throwing their books, which worked until they ran out of books.

Thankfully, the bell rang at that moment, and the Slytherins dived out of the door, taking off at a run without bothering to see if the other students escaped.

Their last class of the day was a free period, and they spent it in the Common Room, telling everyone who passed about their Defense lesson. The Seventh Years, who had class with him that morning, loaned credibility to their words, and the 'warning' quickly turned into vivid re-enactments of the class, with the Seventh Years using more advanced spells to provide the special effects.

Anyone passing near the Slytherin Common Room would have paused at the sound of laughter echoing through the dungeons. Inside the Common Room, however, the Slytherins couldn't have cared less.

If it had half the school laughing at the blond idiot when they found out, that was just too everyone of Lockhart's incompetence was for a good cause.

The fact that Slytherins were hardly known for their good deeds, and were fully intent on humiliating Lockhart in the process didn't matter in the slightest.

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A/N: The next chapter is up! It may be a few weeks until the chapter after this, as I have my TAFE Practical Work Placement coming up, and as I wish to pass the course, I will have less time to write.

As always, I hope you enjoyed and would love for you to leave a review telling me what you think.

Thanks,
Nat

Disclaimer: Obviously, I don't own Harry Potter. Do we really have to go through this every time?

Summary: See previous chapters. I'm getting sick of typing it up every time.

Chapter Seventeen

The first week passed relatively without incident, if you didn't count Ron Weasley's wand turning into something of a Health Hazard. It would fizzle or let out alarming amounts of black smoke, and more than one student, not only in Slytherin, seemed to find an endless source of amusement in goading Ron into casting something, then sitting back to watch the results from a safe distance.

It wasn't until the weekend, however, that anything really happened. This year's Quidditch fans had been talking about when matches would start up, try-outs having been held the first day back, before anyone would think of spying, and Draco had seemed very smug and sure that he would be the new Slytherin Seeker.

On Saturday, the rest of the House found out why. The Slytherin Team came back from their first practice gloating about the new Nimbus 2001 that each member had received. It appeared that Lucius Malfoy had bought them upon his son being made the Slytherin Seeker, although Draco had earned the position by his own merit. Flint was a Quidditch Fanatic, and nothing would have stopped him from holding fair try-outs, ambition and bribery or not.

The other reason for gloating was the way that they had been able to kick the Gryffindors off the pitch that morning. They had waited a while to observe the Gryffindor training and make a dramatic entrance, and there had been more than one comment on how the Gryffindors should have thanked them for kicking them off, as everyone except Wood looked ready to drop.

Other interesting bits involved Ron Weasley trying to Hex Draco to make him belch slugs and have the spell backfire, and accidentally-on-purpose knocking out the irritating first-year, Colin Creevy, with a bludger.

At least Harry would have a few days without the little idiot following him around all the time.

Potions was fun, as usual, though Transfigurations less so. Herbology continued with Mandrakes as an ongoing project, while they moved on to strangler figs, which really did try to strangle you if you got agitated. The trick was to remain calm. Charms also continued to be interesting, but ironically, Defense Against the Dark Arts was the most entertaining of all.

The Gryffindors suffered through it quietly, with their main questioner (Hermione) being too enamored with Lockhart to say anything, but the Slytherins found great enjoyment in reading through the books before-hand (It was easier if Roisin pretended that she was still a Muggle and this was a fairy-tale), finding all of the flaws, often with help from the nit-picking older years, and loudly pointing them out in class.

Lockhart did not find it nearly as funny as the students did.

October came, bringing with it a damp chill and a multitude of colds among the staff and students. It got to the point where one could go to Madam Pomfrey for a potions accident, and she would be reaching for a Pepper-up Potion as soon as you opened the door, before she had even looked at you or you had opened your mouth to say what was wrong.

It was fun watching a red-head take one, however. The smoke that poured out of a person's ears after taking the Potion gave the impression that their whole head was on fire. The red-head in question (often a Weasley) seldom found it as funny, (and it usually sent the Weasley Twins' pranks in a slightly more vicious direction) so it was safer to mock at a distance.

Raindrops the size of bullets pounded against the castle windows for days on end. The lake rose, turning the grounds and flowerbeds into muddy streams. Outdoor activities, with the exception of Quidditch Practice, came to a halt. The trips to and from Castle and Greenhouse for Herbology were taken at a run, and frequently had Argus Filch, the caretaker, complaining for hours about mud on the floor.

Halloween was fast approaching, however, along with the tri-annual cessation of hostilities between the four Houses to celebrate Samhain. A celebration of the harvest and the dead, the non-Christian students were cheerfully making their own preparations. Seamus and Mary had been disappointed that they would not be celebrating with their family this year, but were bouncing off the walls as the days before Samhain passed.

There would be a school-wide celebration of Halloween on the 31st of October, and then the students participating in Samhain would take November the 1st off. Many of the teachers would have preferred to just give everyone the day off, as most of the school was absent and they often had to teach the same lesson twice, but Dumbledore, for whatever reason, refused.

Still, the Great Hall was decorated spectacularly for Halloween, and one had to appreciate the effort, and resulting splendor, that had been put into it.

Unlike last year, there were no disruptions and pandemonium about trolls, and everything was fine as they ate, drank, and played tricks like banishing bats into Ravenclaw and (if you could aim well enough across two tables) Gryffindor's punch bowls and food platters. The resulting shrieks were always worth it.

It was not until the Feast had ended and everyone was leaving that anything happened.

Roisin was held up by returning Seamus to the Gryffindor table (he had been sitting with Mary and Roisin at Slytherin) and his friends before leaving the Hall. Desdemona and Blaise had waited for her, and they were about to head back down to the dungeons when they saw a large commotion up ahead, a few stair-flights up. Following the rest of the crowd, they pushed their way to the front. To no surprise, Draco was already there, and the cause of the commotion was instantly apparent. Filch's cat, Mrs. Norris, was hanging from a torch sconce by her tail, stiff as a board, her eyes wide and staring. Worse than this, however, was the writing on the wall, between two windows: THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE!

Nearby, Selena gracefully fainted, collapsing into Tiberius's arms. Desdemona had gone pale, but was prevented from doing anything similar by Argus Filch charging past, shrieking about his cat being killed. Not wishing to be caught at the scene of the crime and scapegoat-ed, Blaise grabbed Draco, Roisin and Desdemona grabbed Pansy and Millicent, Crabbe and Goyle followed their example and grabbed Theo, and the Second Year Slytherins made themselves very scarce. They could just as easily get the information from their Housemates when everyone got back.

Mrs. Norris's Petrification was the talk of the school the next day, and Samhain preparations were taken even more seriously than usual. A night where magic was strongest and the veil between worlds the thinnest, students prayed to dead ancestors for protection and safety, casting the strongest protection charms and rituals that they knew. Seamus and Mary did not leave Roisin's side the entire night, and everyone stayed with at least one other person. Houses aside, nobody wanted to be alone.

The next day, however, they had to face reality again. House barriers went back up, and life went back to mostly normal. The attack was still the talk of the school, and Filch was keeping it fresh in everyone's mind. If he wasn't pacing the spot where Mrs. Norris had been attacked, sometimes trying to scrub off the message, then he was skulking through the halls, jumping out at unsuspecting students and trying to put them in detention.

Considering that the main reasons were things like 'Breathing Loudly' or 'Looking Too Happy', the Slytherins just went to Professor Snape, who oversaw their detentions, which usually involved extra studying, rather than Filch's proposed punishments of hanging the students from the ceiling by their ankles.

Harry had been bearing the brunt of it, and with Hermione closeted in the library and Ron's complete lack of sensitivity, he had started to seek Roisin out to sit and talk somewhere out of the way.

This time, they had taken advantage of the lull in the rain and were sitting in the lower branches of an Ash tree. Harry sat with his back against the trunk, knees drawn up to his chest. "I don't get it, Roisin. I've had people looking at me and running in the opposite direction

after what happened. Ron is acting like there is nothing to worry about and Hermione has to be hunted down and dragged out of the library for meals! Never mind talking or reassurance! Why does everyone suddenly think that I'm the Heir of Slytherin?"

Roisin was stretched out on the next branch over, head resting on her arms as she looked at him. "Draco's furious about that, by the way. Says that there's no way it could be you, and the rest of the House agrees. Shocking as it may sound, I sort of agree with Weasley. Just keep low for a while, and it will eventually blow over. Hermione will come out of the library eventually, and people will realize how stupid they are being. Your friends know that you aren't the Heir of Slytherin, and I know that you are far too much of a Gryffindor for that to be true, and that's all that really matters."

They sat in silence for a few more minutes, until it was apparent that the rest of the castle was starting to stir. Harry leapt from his branch and landed in a graceful crouch. Roisin tried to imitate him and landed flat on her backside. Glaring at a visibly amused Harry, Roisin cast a quick cleaning charm that she had learned over the holidays, and they walked up to the castle together.

The next incident really worth mentioning happened in History of Magic, a surprise in and of itself.

History of Magic was well known for two things: being the most indescribably boring class in the school, and being the one Gryffindor-Slytherin class without any open or subdued hostility.

Professor Binns probably wouldn't have noticed anyway, but since almost every student slipped into a stupor about five minutes in, no-one was ever awake enough for hostilities, even a thrown ball of parchment, or indeed anything noteworthy to happen.

Until today.

Roisin and Desdemona were leaning against each other and trying not to fall asleep. The class was dull enough to keep even Desdemona quiet, a rare feat. Theo and Draco were passing rune puzzles in a desperate attempt to make time go faster. It wasn't working.

Millicent and Pansy had lost their battle and were quietly snoozing on their desks. Roisin had just decided that it really wasn't worth the effort to sit up and turn around to see what Crabbe and Goyle were doing when the unthinkable happened.

Professor Binns was interrupted by Hermione Granger waving her hand in the air. "Please, Professor, I was wondering if you could tell us anything about the Chamber of Secrets."

This caused surprised reactions all over the classroom. Neville Longbottom's elbow slipped off the desk, nearly sending him out of his chair. Dean Thomas stopped staring out of the window. Pansy and Millicent both sat up at the same time, cracking heads. Draco glared at Theo for accidentally dropping the stone Rune Puzzle on his foot.

Even Professor Binns looked startled. It was a safe bet that no-one had interrupted his lessons before. "My subject is History of Magic. I deal with facts, Miss Granger, not myths and legends!"

He started to continue, but stuttered to a halt when Hermione's arm started waving again. "Please, sir, don't legends always have a basis in fact?"

Professor Binns was staring at her in amazement, as was the rest of the class. Finally, a topic worth studying! If Hermione could just convince him to actually discuss it...

Perhaps she had succeeded! "Well," the History Professor said slowly, "yes, one could argue that. However, the legend of which you speak is such a very sensational, even ludicrous tale..."

It looked like Professor Binns was about to refuse, but he finally decided that such a unique, legendary event (his class hanging on to his every word) deserved an explanation of something just as legendary. "Oh, very well. Now, let me see, the Chamber of Secrets.

You all know, of course, that Hogwarts was founded over a thousand years ago – the exact date is uncertain – by the four greatest witches

and wizards of the age. The four school houses are named after them: Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin. They built this castle together, far from prying muggle eyes, for it was an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution.”

The Gryffindors were still in rapt silence, but the Slytherins glanced at each other quickly. There was not a family in Slytherin who had not lost a member to Witch Burnings, and even centuries later, it was still something of a sensitive topic.

Professor Binns was still talking. “For many years, the founders lived in harmony, seeking out youngsters who showed signs of magic and bringing them to the castle to be educated. But then disagreements began to spring up between them. A rift began to grow between Slytherin and the others. Slytherin wished to be more selective about the students admitted to Hogwarts. He believed that magical learning should be kept within all-magical families. He disliked the practice of accepting students of muggle heritage, believing them to be untrustworthy. After a while, there was a serious argument on the subject between Gryffindor and Slytherin, and Slytherin left the school.”

Professor Binns paused, pursing his lips as the class digested this part of the story. They continued to wait expectantly, eager to hear the rest.

“Reliable historical sources tell us this much,” he said, “but these honest facts have been obscured by the fanciful legend of the Chamber of Secrets. The story goes that Slytherin built a hidden chamber, of which the other founders knew nothing.

“Slytherin, according to legend, sealed the Chamber of Secrets so that none could open it until his own true heir arrived at the school. Slytherin’s heir alone would be able to unlock the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the horror within, and purge the school of all those unworthy to study magic.”

There was complete silence as Professor Binns finished telling the story, but not the usual, sleepy silence that usually filled the room. The Gryffindors looked uneasy, but the Slytherins only exchanged neutral looks. Slytherin never showed weakness, so any worries about the subject were best discussed in the privacy of the Dorms or Common Room.

Professor Binns finally noticed that they were all still thinking about the Chamber of Secrets. He looked annoyed. "The whole story is complete nonsense, of course!" he said, "Naturally, the school has been searched for such a chamber, many times, by the most learned witches and wizards. The Chamber of Secrets does not exist! A tale to frighten the gullible!"

Hermione's hand was back in the air. Three actual questions in History of Magic! An unbeaten (not to mention probably unbeatable) record! "Sir – what do you mean by 'the horror within the Chamber'?"

"That is believed to be a terrible monster, which only the heir of Slytherin can control." Professor Binns's voice was returning to its dry, reedy drone.

The class exchanged nervous looks. Professor Binns noticed them. "I tell you, the thing does not exist! There is no Chamber and no monster!"

This only set the Gryffindors off. It started with Seamus Finnigan. "But sir, if the Chamber can only be opened by Slytherin's true heir, no one else would be able to find it, would they?"

Professor Binns did not seem pleased at the question. "Nonsense, O'Flaherty. If a long succession of Hogwarts Headmasters and Headmistresses haven't found the thing –"

Now it was Parvati Patil. Maybe she wasn't such an airhead as rumor had it. "But Professor, you'd probably have to use dark magic to open it –"

An interesting idea worth pursuing, but slightly offensive that people automatically linked Slytherin to Dark Magic. By his tone of voice,

Professor Binns just wanted to get them all to shut up. “Just because a person doesn’t use dark magic, Miss Pennyfeather, doesn’t mean he can’t. I repeat, if the likes of Dumbledore –“

The History professor looked ready to snap as Dean Thomas interrupted him again. “But maybe you’ve got to be related to Slytherin, so Dumbledore couldn’t –“

Professor Binns had had enough. “That’s enough!” he snapped. “There is no evidence that Slytherin built so much as a secret broom cupboard, let alone a Chamber! I regret telling you such a ridiculous story! We will, if you please, return to history. To solid, believable, verifiable fact!”

Despite protests, that was his last word, and within five minutes, the class had sunk back into its usual stupor.

It was with great relief that the class ended, and the Slytherins forced their way through the halls to their Common Room. History was their last class for the day, so they would have time to discuss this in private. It was a fair bit to take in.

Settled again in the Boys Dorm, they started discussing what they had learned. Predictably, Desdemona spoke first, sitting on the floor. “So, what did you think of the legend?”

Roisin was sitting in reverse on one of the chairs, leaning against the back. “Given the era, I think Slytherin had a very good point in being selective about which students they taught. There were other witches and wizards around who could have offered apprenticeships, rather than risking someone’s neighbors finding out and leading a mob. Purge the school sounds a bit extreme, though.”

Draco was lying stomach down on his bed, facing the rest of the room. “I still can’t believe that Granger actually managed to talk Binns into telling us. If I thought I could get close enough without being hexed, I might actually congratulate her.”

Pansy smirked. “I can’t believe that the rumors were wrong, and Patil actually seems to have a brain in her head.”

Millicent raised an eyebrow. "Her twin is in Ravenclaw, and they can't be that different. Back on topic."

Blaise shrugged. "The Gryffindors raised a few good points. I wonder what the legend means by 'true heir'. People had lots of children back then, because of the mortality rate due to Burnings, feuds and less advanced medicine, and the oldest family trees are intertwined enough that any number of people could share a few drops with Slytherin."

Roisin thought it over. "Direct decent through the first-born, probably. But I don't think that there are any families named Slytherin, which makes it a lot harder. Maybe the last was a girl, and changed her name?"

Theo shifted to a more comfortable position. "Who knows? Until we know more about the monster and it's method of purging, I say we stay out of it. Everyone with brains who doesn't think Potter is the heir thinks that it's one of us, and we don't want a huge panic and lynching."

There were murmurs of agreement all around. Draco stood up. "Enough of this. It's finally stopped raining for a bit. I say we take advantage and spend some time outside before Dinner."

The others stood up. Fresh air would do everyone some good, and get rid of the 'Gloom-and-Doom' atmosphere that had been going around.

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A/N: So, next chapter up. Sorry for the long wait, but between Work Placement, looking for a job and all the practical assignments I had to do, I barely had time to eat and sleep, let alone write.

Anyway, take five seconds to tell me what you think. Please?

Nat.

Disclaimer: Yet again, I do not own Harry Potter. Has this somehow failed to sink in by now? After eighteen chapters?

Summary: See previous chapters

Chapter Eighteen

The whispers and murmurs about the Heir of Slytherin had finally started to die down. It had taken several weeks, but that was beside the point.

Meanwhile, there were several students (mainly fifth year and below) who were starting to wish that the monster was real and would make another appearance. Sure, the wish might be a bit extreme, but it was widely considered better than suffering through the presence of the wished-for target.

Everyone under Fifth Year still had mandatory Defense Against the Dark Arts, and were therefore forced to suffer in his classroom three times a week, while he talked about himself and all the things he had supposedly done. The Slytherins didn't believe a word of it, and Defense lessons were frequently spent passing notes and trying to figure out ways to escape.

After the Pixie Incident, Lockhart had obviously gotten the message that live demonstrations were a Bad Idea. Sadly for everyone else, Lockhart had decided to make them act out parts of his book, sometimes as a class, sometimes with only one of the Houses, sometimes with only one or two 'volunteers'.

The first time had been particularly memorable. Lockhart had split the class into the two Houses, and given each a book to study parts of. The Slytherins had been told to act out parts of Breaks with a Banshee, and Lockhart had handed out roles, somehow managing to infuriate the entire class.

Draco had been forced to play the "Sidekick, in awe of being allowed to assist me". Someone had managed to get off a silencing charm before Draco could protest, but the Slytherins had barely left the classroom afterward before he broke into a rant about how "Malfoys do not serve! We bow to no-one!"

Theo and Blaise had been shoved into the roles of the “Incompetent Mayor and his brother, at their wits end before I arrived”. Being in the top ten of their year, grade-wise, the two of them had not been happy.

Desdemona had been enlisted as the “Mayor’s daughter, a vision of calm serenity”. Considering the fact that Desdemona was frequently described as ‘very energetic’, if not outright ‘hyperactive’, and considered it her duty to liven things up if they got too calm, the girl had to be forcefully restrained from strangling Lockhart.

Pansy, Millicent, Crabbe and Goyle had been forced to play random villagers “with the limited intelligence that one expects in such places.” Given that Pansy and Millicent were both born and raised in manors just near small, isolated communities much like the one Lockhart had described, the two girls had not taken this well. Neither had Crabbe or Goyle, who were perfectly aware that they were not the brightest stars in the sky, but felt that there was no need to rub it in.

Roisin had been forced to play the banshee.

She had found this particularly infuriating for a number of reasons. One of the Great Families of Ireland, the O’Conner Clan was among those who heard the Banshee’s cry as a warning omen of Death or Danger. Being forced to portray one made her feel distinctly uncomfortable.

The only good part about it was that the whole mess (especially Lockhart) made for a very inspired and convincing lament, and the cries of grief and despair were not entirely faked.

Also, the Gryffindors were too busy mourning their own impending loss of dignity (Wandering with Were-wolves) to comment on Slytherin House’s suffering.

And one did have to admit that the Gryffindors had it worse. The brains of the House was still smitten with Lockhart, and when Lockhart wasn’t making the rest of the class perform, Harry was frequently singled out to help Lockhart “Demonstrate” scenes out of his books. Feeling sympathetic to his plight, (not even Gryffindors

should be forced to go through that) the Slytherins avoided voicing the multitude of sardonic remarks based on this ordeal, and even Draco refrained from taunting Harry.

After a particularly painful Defense lesson, Harry and Roisin had met during a free period, and were sitting in the Ash tree again, savoring another rare instance of dry weather. There was a Quidditch match in a few days, Gryffindor versus Slytherin, and Harry, aware that Roisin only came when she had good reason, was trying to talk his cousin into attending.

Roisin held out for the sake of appearances, but eventually agreed to go. After all, it was Draco's first match, and if that was not enough inspiration for the Second Years, at least, Flint had spent the last few days wandering the Common Room, loudly commenting on how he would skin anyone who failed to turn up and show support.

Given that Flint was as much of a Quidditch Fanatic as Gryffindor's Oliver Wood, the rest of Slytherin took him at his word and promised to be there.

The day of the first Quidditch Match dawned clear. Draco's attitude was not so bright. Stricken with nerves and with a faint greenish tinge to his face, it had taken nearly ten minutes of reassurance and finally outright threats to get Draco down to breakfast and actually eating something.

Draco finally managed some toast and about half a sausage before the Slytherin Quidditch Team was dragged out of the Hall and toward the Quidditch Pitch.

Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw were all against Slytherin, as usual, and there had been more than a few remarks about Slytherins buying their way onto the team. Knowing that Flint would have given up the broomstick offer if there had been someone better, the Slytherins ignored this, and occasionally retaliated about inferiority complexes if a person had to blame a broomstick for their inadequacies.

Despite the various remarks and taunts that pre-ceded any Gryffindor vs. Slytherin match, everyone was worked up over the upcoming

game, and it seemed that every House was determined to out-cheer the others.

The Quidditch Teams marched onto the field, and the cheering reached new levels. Roisin would not be surprised if Dumbledore received complaints about the noise level from residents of the Forbidden Forest. Next time someone talked her into attending a match, she was going to bring earplugs.

Not more than ten minutes into the game, Roisin was beginning to wonder if the Gryffindor vs. Slytherin games were somehow cursed, or if it was just Harry.

Draco's nerve attack had disappeared and he was performing wonderfully. Admittedly, almost no one in the school could match Harry as a seeker, but that was beside the point.

The new brooms were serving the Slytherin Team well, much to the other House's annoyance, and they seemed to be scoring almost constantly, much to Keeper Wood's fury. On the downside, this was at least partially because of the absence of Gryffindor's beaters, who were busy trying to stop a rogue bludger from killing Harry. Also, it had started raining.

Slytherin had just scored again, bringing the score up to 70-10 in Slytherin's favor, when Madam Hooch blew her whistle for a Time-Out. Using an eavesdropping spell, developed by a former Slytherin and a closely guarded House-Secret, Roisin looked for the Gryffindor Huddle while the rest of her House cheered, and rolled her eyes as she heard Wood berating the twins for not stopping the other bludger from interfering with the rest of the team.

One of the twins (Most of the school had given up trying to figure out which was which) retorted that they were trying to prevent the other bludger from murdering Harry, but the Spying Spell was quickly wearing off, making Wood's reaction inaudible.

Whatever he said, it was rendered a moot point, as the Gryffindor Team took off again. Draco and Harry were both searching for the snitch, although Draco was taking the occasional pause to taunt

Harry. Roisin made a mental not to talk to him about this; petty rivalries had no place in sport, his time could be better spent by searching for the snitch while his opponent was distracted, and sticking close to a person with a bludger chasing them had a good chance of you winding up as Collateral Damage.

As it was, the bludger managed to break Harry's arm when he stayed in one spot a second too long, then flew back to finish him off as Harry shot toward Draco.

Draco's eyes widened as he saw the bludger shooting toward him, and noticed the snitch a second too late as Harry grabbed it from near Draco's head. Roisin winced: Flint was really going to let him have it for that one.

Roisin winced again as she saw Harry falling toward the ground, though he somehow managed to keep hold of the snitch. As Slytherin sulked and Gryffindor gloated, Roisin spotted Gilderoy Lockhart strutting to where Harry lay, surrounded by the rest of his team and a crowd of overly-cheerful Gryffindors.

Roisin was sure that she turned absolutely white. Despite his posturing, Lockhart was a complete incompetent, and who knew what kind of damage he would do to Harry in a failed attempt to make himself look better! Fighting her way through the crowds, Roisin made her way toward Harry as fast as she could, but got there just in time to hear Lockhart mumbling some kind of guilty excuse for what was supposed to have been a pain-numbing or bone-mending whatever.

Elbowing her way through the crowd, Roisin stopped in horror at the sight of a pink, fleshy blob sticking out of her cousin's sleeve. Stuff bone-mending! Lockhart had removed the bones, even the ones in Harry's hand and fingers! Hermione and Ron hauled Harry to his feet just as the irritating Creevy boy snapped a few more pictures. Roisin resolved to hunt down and hex him at the next opportunity.

She was about to follow the Gryffindor Trio when Lockhart blocked her way. "Now, now, Miss O'Conner. Can't have you airing any grudges over loosing, now can we?"

Seeing a number of particularly stupid Gryffindors jerk at Lockhart's comment, (Most had the sense to realize that Harry and Roisin remained on good terms, regardless of House, and Roisin was among those who had to be begged into attending matches anyway, so she wouldn't be that worked up over defeat) Roisin scowled. Shooting a discreet hex at Lockhart's bootlaces, tying them together, Roisin shoved her way past Lockhart, through the rest of the crowd and followed the rest of the Gryffindor Team after Harry.

Hearing the 'splat' of a body hitting the muddy ground behind her, Roisin smirked. That should cheer Harry up a bit. Knowing that it would be a reasonable length of time before Flint stopped yelling at Draco and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the team, Roisin estimated that she would have at least ten minutes to visit Harry in the Hospital Wing before she would have to return to the Common Room and help sooth various egos.

The Gryffindor Team spotted her, but as her presence saved them from a full out Peeves-Attack, they let her join them. After a quick stop at the kitchens (Roisin memorized the location and mode of entry for future reference) they made their way up to the hospital wing, laden with cakes, sweets and pumpkin juice.

As predicted and anticipated, everyone except Hermione, and Harry in particular, laughed at Roisin's description of what she had done to Lockhart. There were one or two complaints that she didn't hit him with something worse and Roisin had to explain that the loss of dignity was worse than any second-year spell as far as Lockhart was concerned, but it was funny anyway.

This lead to a temporary cease-fire in the Hospital Wing, and they were all getting started on a good mini-party when Madam Pomfrey intervened and threw them all out, claiming that Harry needed rest. Outside the Hospital Wing, Roisin was met by Blaise and Desdemona, who had overheard Lockhart's remark and wanted to make sure that she was safe from any potential mobbing, as emotions and impulsive actions always took some time to settle down after a Slytherin vs. Gryffindor anything.

Halfway back to the Common Room, they bumped into Colin Creevy, who was holding a bunch of grapes, and several newly-developed photos!

Food could wait, that little insect was not getting away with potential blackmail photos! The Gryffindor's eyes widened when he saw the three Slytherins, but Blaise hit him with a flying tackle before he could escape, and Desdemona helped hold him down while Roisin wrestled the photos away.

Deciding that the images were really not worth being hexed by a trio of irate older students, Colin picked up the grapes and took off, leaving the three Slytherins to examine the photos.

Rifling through them, Roisin noticed that they were all of the Quidditch game, and in order from last to first.

The photos on top of the pile were of Lockhart, presumably taken after Roisin had left. Oh, but these were going in a book of treasured memories! Lockhart was covered in mud, presumably from her tying his laces together. Better still, it seemed that someone had overheard his remark and taken offence. Lockhart's skin had been turned purple, and his hair was standing on end, dyed a bright green.

Blackmail and amusement in abundance! No more acting in DADA for her!

Next, Roisin picked out the four copies of the picture Colin had taken of her, which were quickly shredded and bound straight for the nearest fireplace. Next to be picked out were the ones of Harry in the mud. She would give two thirds of those to Harry, who would probably take great pleasure in destroying them.

The rest she might be able to auction off the rest to his fan club or some of the girls who were crushing on him, (how Harry remained oblivious of them, Roisin had no idea) and blame Creevy. Back in the Slytherin Common Room, the rest of the House spent nearly an hour getting the Quidditch Team into a mood that may not have been good, but was at least no longer outright black.

Spurred on by their early scoring success, the Quidditch Team had put up an excellent play, and Slytherin had only lost by fifty points after Harry caught the snitch. It was a small consolation, but coupled with Lockhart's humiliation, it was enough for Slytherin to throw their own little party.

Several of the older students went to get food as the Sixth and Seventh Years started re-arranging the furniture and setting up music. Watching Desdemona drag a reluctant Theo onto the impromptu dance floor and ignoring the panicked look of a First-Year boy as Mary approached him determinedly, Roisin smiled. Slytherin life was never boring.

The next day could not be called 'Boring', either.

Flashing through the Rumor mill, like a house on fire, came the news that there had been another attack by Slytherin's Monster, and Colin Creevy had been Petrified.

Sending Mary to ask Seamus, and another First-Year to the Hospital Wing under the pretense of a cold, these facts were quickly verified, and Roisin was very glad that the attack had been discovered late at night, and that she, Desdemona and Blaise had not run into anyone else on the way back to the Common Room.

The tension and suspense following Halloween was back, and worse than before. First Years from all houses refused to go anywhere alone, moving around in tight groups, and the Teachers seemed to be tightening security.

Knowing that they would get nothing useful from Lockhart, the older years in Slytherin stepped up in teaching the younger ones how to defend themselves. That it had been a Gryffindor attacked meant that three quarters of the school were giving Slytherin suspicious looks, and the House Prefects had almost instantly banned them from going anywhere alone, and avoiding scrutiny and suspicion (aside from being in Slytherin to begin with) at all costs.

Meanwhile, a roaring trade in talismans, amulets and protective devices was sweeping the school behind the teacher's backs.

Knowing that Slytherin was unlikely to attack his own House, and trusting in the protection charms and rituals cast barely a month ago, the Slytherins mostly sat back and watched, occasionally interfering at someone else's expense.

One of the few exceptions, Roisin wrote to her Grandmother for a protective charm, which would be better than anything a student could whip up. Looking up from where she and Pansy were discussing the best way to use their family's reputations with Wards and Curse-Breaking, Millicent raised an eyebrow. "Why are you asking for something protective, Roisin? You are descended from one of the oldest families in Ireland, you're no slouch with sheer magical power, and you're a Slytherin. What do you have to be worried about?"

Roisin sealed the letter and looked around for someone to escort her to the owlery. "My father is a Squib, my mother is the sister of a Muggle-Born witch, and my brother is about as un-magical as you get. Better to be safe than sorry."

Most of the school signed up to go home for Christmas, when Professor McGonagall came around with the lists.

Harry, as usual, stayed behind, as did Ron and Hermione. Draco's parents had gone to visit some relations in France for the holidays, and Draco had balked at the idea of weeks spent having his cheek pinched by older relatives. As Draco himself had pointed out, "No amount of being the center of attention is worth the humiliation I'll go through with a horde of old ladies cooing over me. I'm staying here."

A few of the older years were staying as well, and Pansy, Crabbe and Goyle had elected to stay and keep him company. Everyone else packed their bags and got ready for the holidays, glad to get away from the stifling atmosphere at Hogwarts.

The next week, a week before the end of term, there was an incident in Potions.

Thursday was their Practical, and they were making a swelling solution, and the lesson had been progressing as most Potions classes did. Professor Snape was prowling between labs, making waspish comments. The Slytherins threw subtle taunts, trying to provoke the Gryffindors into doing something stupid. The Gryffindors were mostly trying to make themselves invisible, or retaliated when Professor Snape had his back turned.

Roisin was working with Blaise that day, and their Swelling Solution was in its final stages when there was a loud 'BANG!' and Goyle's cauldron exploded, sending the potion everywhere.

Blaise threw up a weak shielding charm that they had been learning from the Seventh Years, and pulled Roisin under their desk with him. Being on the other side of the classroom and several stations back, they managed to avoid getting hit.

The rest of the class was in a panic as Professor Snape tried to restore order, shouting for everyone who had been affected to come up and be dosed with a Deflating Draught.

In addition to the antidote, Professor Snape also provided some very dire threats and the promise of expulsion if he found the culprit who had thrown a firework into Goyle's cauldron.

With the bad mood it had put her head of house in, Roisin would be more than glad to assist him, and even the Slytherins were glad to escape the Potions Classroom when the bell rang.

The next Monday, there was a notice outside the Great Hall, announcing the formation of a Dueling Club. Given the attacks and the overall tension, which was sure to escalate into violence any day now, most of the Hogwarts students thought it was a wonderful idea.

At eight o'clock that night, almost the entire school was crowded into the Great Hall. The tables had vanished, replaced by a golden stage, and everyone was carrying their wands and chattering excitedly about what they would learn. Or, if they were paired up, who they would love to hex.

The popular choice for an instructor was Professor Flitwick, who had reportedly been a Dueling Champion when he was younger. Another popular idea was Professor McGonagall, who, according to Fionna, had personified the Scottish saying: "Men are natural Warriors, but a woman in battle is a truly dangerous and bloodthirsty thing."

Someone had commented on if she was going to Glare the Monster of Slytherin into submission. If push came to shove, the odds were on McGonagall.

Waiting for someone to appear, Theo commented, "I don't care who it is, as long as they can actually –" he trailed off as the door opened, "teach us something. Never mind."

Their instructor was Gilderoy Lockhart.

Roisin closed her eyes. "Hellfire and Damnation. Can we at least hope he chose a competent Assistant?"

Her question went unanswered. Several of the older Slytherins were on the verge of turning around and walking straight back out again when Lockhart introduced his 'Assistant', Professor Snape.

Slytherin attitudes immediately changed from 'Get-Me-Out-Of-Here' to 'You-Couldn't-Pay-Me-To-Leave' in the space of a few seconds. Professor Snape was already glaring daggers at Lockhart for the introduction, and they were on the edge of their seats waiting to see what their Head of House would do to the Defense Teacher.

Roisin could see any number of people rolling their eyes as Lockhart told them that they would "Still have your Potions Master when I'm done with him."

If any of her Housemates would have understood the Muggle Reference, Roisin would have made a comment about the resemblance between a guided nuclear missile and Professor Snape's glare at Lockhart. As it was, Demetra, a Sixth Year Prefect, couldn't resist shouting, "We know that! Question is, will we still have a Defense Professor?"

This was greeted with Laughter from the other Slytherins, and Roisin could see several other students from various Houses snickering.

Lockhart's face flushed pink, but he collected himself. Briefly explaining the Dueling procedure, then taking an elaborate bow and assuming a ridiculous stance opposite Professor Snape, who looked disgusted at the posturing. "On the count of three we will cast our first spells. Neither of us will be aiming to kill, of course."

Maybe the blond really isn't from a bottle, after all, was Roisin's thought as all of the Slytherins present exchanged disbelieving looks. Millicent was the one to voice the unanimous thought. "I wouldn't bet anything I particularly cared to lose on it."

Both professors attacked at the same time. Professor Snape was faster and calmly disarmed Lockhart, blasting him across the room and into a wall as he did. The Slytherins and several other students cheered loudly.

Lockhart was noticeably wobbling as he stood up and dusted himself off. "Well, that was a Disarming Charm. As you see, I've lost my wand – thank you, Miss Brown. Yes, an excellent idea to show them that one, Professor Snape, but if you don't mind my saying so," (Professor Snape obviously did) "it was really very obvious what you were about to do. If I had wanted to stop you, it would have been only too easy. However, I felt it would be instructive to let...them...see..."

Lockhart trailed off, obviously having noticed Professor Snape's expression, which was currently promising Doom and a slow, painful death. Going for self-preservation, Lockhart quickly turned back to the crowd. "Enough demonstrating. I'm going to come among you and put you into pairs. Professor Snape, if you'd like to help me?"

They moved through the crowd. Most were paired with members of their own house, but there was the occasional inter-House pairing. Roisin was just squaring off with Desdemona and Pansy was facing down an apprehensive Amanda Brocklehurst, when Millicent and Draco were called by Professor Snape. Both looked happy when told that they would be partnering Hermione Granger and Harry, respectively.

Mentally reviewing possible spells, Roisin rolled her eyes. This was not going to go well. Draco and Harry's rivalry was well known, and the confrontation promised to be messy. Millicent had overheard Granger and Weasley laughing about the effect of the Swelling Solution last week, and Millicent didn't get mad; she got even.

"Face your partners!" Lockhart yelled from the stage, safely out of range, "and bow to each other."

Exchanging an amused smirk, Roisin and Desdemona bowed to each other. From up on the stage, Lockhart struck a dramatic pose, as though he was a lord announcing a tournament. "Wands at the ready! When I count to three, cast the charm to disarm your opponents. Disarm only – we don't want any accidents."

Like Professor Snape kicking your backside. The multitude of stifled snickers was ignored as Lockhart counted down. "One...two...three!"

The room exploded with a barrage of spells and hexes. Dodging to avoid Desdemona's Jelly-Legs jinx, Roisin hit her wand-hand with a stinging charm, following up with a mild Pulse Spell to knock the wand away when Desdemona tried to retrieve it. Desdemona was ready to switch tactics and tackle Roisin, but was hit by someone else's stray spell and knocked to the ground.

This was nothing to what was going on around them. Mary was against a Muggle-born Hufflepuff, who looked terrified as Roisin's cousin dramatically widened her eyes and cast a dancing hex, designed to miss, cackling like a stereotypical Wicked Witch from Muggle Fairytales. The Hufflepuff actually dropped their wand in fright, leaving himself open to a Body-bind curse.

Professor Snape was observing this calmly, assessing everyone's level of competence as Lockhart ran around shrieking for everyone to stop. After a few minutes, Professor Snape took things into his own hands. "Finite Incantium!"

A haze of smoke hung over the entire hall. Roisin helped Desdemona to her feet, looking around. Pansy stood over Amanda, who lay on

the floor, trying to catch her breath. Harry and Draco were standing up, doubled over and panting. Millicent had Hermione in a headlock, and Hermione was whimpering in pain. Their wands lay forgotten, and Millicent didn't look like she was letting go anytime soon, until Harry and Ron leapt forward to pull the two girls apart.

Moving through the recovering students, Lockhart obviously realized that dueling pairs had not been the best of ideas. "Perhaps I had better teach you how to block unfriendly spells."

He glanced at Professor Snape, who looked almost pleased at the prospect of using Lockhart as a practice dummy for some of his more "Unfriendly" spells. Lockhart quickly looked away, searching for a dueling pair.

When the demonstrating pair turned out to be Harry and Draco, Roisin groaned and buried her face in her hands. If earlier was bad, this would be an unmitigated disaster. Blaise patted her shoulder in consolation. "There, there. It might not be that bad."

Roisin looked up, prepared to correct him on exactly how bad the situation could, and most likely would, become. She was cut off by a loud hissing from the stage. Whipping her head around, Roisin (and just about everyone else) paled. Draco had conjured a large snake and sent it slithering quickly toward Harry. Harry had frozen still, probably the best course of action, and Professor Snape was about to get rid of it when Lockhart bounded forward, still trying to look good for everyone.

Lockhart's wand-brandishing resulted in two things. The first was a very annoyed, not to mention poisonous, reptile. The second was a loud bang which sent the aforementioned snake flying into the crowd, where it immediately set off toward a group of Hufflepuffs. Most of the Hufflepuffs dove out of the way, but one boy (Justin? Roisin thought) was frozen in place as Snape and Harry, both ran toward him, trying to cut off the snake.

Professor Snape was aiming his wand at the snake when Harry started hissing at it, and suddenly, the snake stopped, going as limp as a garden hose.

Professor Snape made the snake disappear in a puff of black smoke, but the room was deathly still for several moments. Everyone was looking at Harry, either awed, stunned, calculating or afraid. The silence was broken by the Hufflepuff Harry had saved shouting, "What do you think you're playing at?" and storming off.

The first and probably last Dueling Club Meeting ended rather quickly after that.

Quickly hustled back to their Common Rooms, it was obvious that this latest incident was going to be the talk of the school for weeks to come.

Following Professor Snape back down to the dungeons, the Slytherins were all exchanging looks, ranging from puzzled of extremely worried. Somehow, they managed to make it to the Boys Dorm before Draco burst out ranting. "Potter's a parselmouth! How the hell did this happen? He's Gryffindor's Golden Boy, and he had our House Patron's most noble gift! What's going to happen next, Lockhart actually teaching us something useful?"

Pansy sighed and motioned to Crabbe and Goyle, who grabbed Draco by the arms and pulled him down onto his bed. Roisin opened her eyes from where she had been leaning back against a chair. "I know I sound ignorant, but could someone tell me what is going on? Aside from a Gryffindor having a Slytherin-noteworthy trait, why is this such a big deal?"

Blaise sighed, leaning over to take her hand. "It's a big deal, Rose, because Salazar Slytherin was famous for talking to snakes. With everyone worrying about the attacks, someone is going to start on how the Monster must have been Symbolic to Slytherin..."

Roisin completed the sentence. "Someone will come up with a giant snake or reptile, and Harry is going to be accused of being the Heir of Slytherin. With him speaking parseltongue, and the fact that Salazar Slytherin died over a thousand years ago, it's going to be very hard to prove otherwise."

The other First Years nodded. Roisin let her head thump back against the chair. "This totally bites."

Desdemona looked like she was about to vocalize a stronger word, when a Prefect stuck their head through the door and ordered the girls back to their own Dorm. Bidding the boys goodnight, Millicent, Desdemona, Pansy and Roisin obeyed. Quickly changing and falling into bed, Roisin closed her eyes. This whole mess was going to give her nightmares.

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A/N: Yes, I know I haven't updated in what seems like forever, but here's an extra-long chapter to make up for it.

In other news, I have 77 hits for Chapter 17, but only four reviews. Tell me what you think, otherwise I can't correct any mistakes or add any favorite things!

Thanks to those who did review,

Nat

Disclaimer: Yet again, I do not own Harry Potter. Has this somehow failed to sink in by now? After this many chapters?

Summary: See previous chapters.

A/N: Tomorrow is the two-year anniversary of my twin sister's death, so this chapter is dedicated to her. We miss you, Sal.

Chapter Nineteen

The last Herbology lesson of term was cancelled, as Professor Sprout wanted to fit little winter-appropriate clothes on the Mandrakes, and didn't feel that any of the students were up to the task.

Deciding to complete as much of their Christmas homework as possible before the holidays, Roisin headed for the library, accompanied by Blaise and Theo. The other Second Years were providing Moral (and shivering) Support to Draco and the rest of the Slytherin Quidditch Team, who had been dragged out for 'One Last Practice' before the end of term.

A group of Hufflepuffs glared at them as they walked through the doors. Roisin ignored them and dragged her companions, who looked more than happy to start a glaring contest, over to a table and opening her Charms book.

For a group that seemed to be trying to hold a "Secret" meeting, the Hufflepuffs were doing a spectacularly lousy job. The would-be-whispers got louder and louder as the Slytherins were trying to study, attempting to ignore the Hufflepuffs' insistence and shoddy reasoning on how Harry was the Heir of Slytherin.

Finally, Roisin gave up trying to calculate how the rat tails were used in ratio to litres of purified water, slammed her Potions book closed and stood up to stalk over to the Hufflepuffs.

Blaise and Theo were perfectly content to sit back and watch; angry Slytherin females were nothing to be trifled with. When faced with one, your best options were to apologize and make yourself scarce, or sit back, stay quiet, and enjoy the show.

And what a wonderful show it promised to be. With Professor Snape as your House Head, you picked up a certain flair for dramatics, specializing in intimidation, and Roisin looked like she fully intended to replace the Hufflepuffs' fear of the Heir with the more immediately pending fear of her.

Roisin's wrath was unfortunately forestalled, however, by the appearance of Harry himself, who by the sound of things, had been looking for Justin to explain his side of the Parselmouth mess. Wanting to hear the explanation herself, Roisin stopped in the shadows and listened. Ooh, Harry was being sarcastic! That always promised to be good and entertaining. "Then I supposed you noticed that after I spoke to it, the snake backed off!"

Maybe the lead Hufflepuff really was as stupid as he looked. "All I saw was you speaking parseltongue and chasing the snake toward Justin."

So, of course, if the pudgy idiot saw it, then it absolutely had to be true. Muttering some choice words that Roisin was sure she wasn't supposed to know, the Slytherin girl felt Blaise and Theo come up behind her as Harry snapped his defence. "I didn't chase the snake at him! It didn't even touch him!"

The Hufflepuff glared back. "It was a near miss!" The Hufflepuff paused, and Roisin wondered if he was searching for his missing brain cells. No such luck. "And in case you were getting any ideas, I can trace my bloodline back through nine generations of witches and wizards and my blood's as pure as anyone's, so —"

Rolling her eyes, Roisin leaned back out of sight as Theo commented. "That explains it then, he's an inbred idiot."

This earned a snicker from the other two. Blaise whispered back. "What's he bragging about, anyway? The Zabini family can trace its roots back to the Wizarding Lords of Ancient Rome, and the Nott line reaches back at least nineteen generations."

Roisin shushed the two of them and turned back to the conversation. She would have thought that the Hufflepuff would have wisened up and shut up by now. "I heard that you hate the Muggles you live with!"

Harry almost snarled his reply. "It's impossible to live with the Dursleys and not hate them!" He did have something of a point. The Dursley's intolerance of magic had led them to virtually disown their previously adored daughter. As the aforementioned daughter, Roisin had not taken this development well. "I'd like to see you try it!"

Watching her cousin storm out of the room, Roisin decided to give him a few minutes to cool off. Meanwhile, she had some Hufflepuffs to intimidate. Melting out of the shadows, she folded her arms and glared. A girl with blonde pigtails was the first to notice her, and let out a yelp of fright. Recalling Professor Snape in potions, Roisin loomed over them. "Some people are trying to study here. Either shut up about my cousin, or I'll make you shut up, and you really, really don't want that."

Another Hufflepuff, Something-or-other Smith, glared back at her. Roisin remained serenely unintimidated as the boy blustered at her. "You're just proof that He's the Heir! You're his cousin, and a Slytherin from an old line, why wouldn't you want to get rid of Muggle-borns, and you're just working together to avoid suspicion!"

Roisin's glare turned nasty. Did Hufflepuffs have a collective, and currently absent, brain or something? Honestly! "That argument holds less water than a sieve. The O'Connors are one of the Great Families of Ireland, not England, and are descended from the Heroes and Kings of old! We know the meaning of Honour, and don't go around killing people for their blood unless it's a Blood-Feud!"

Trying to calm down, Roisin swept back to the table they had been using and gathered her books. Blaise came up behind her. "A bit over the top with dramatics, don't you think?"

Roisin huffed. "Only way to get through to those idiots, I think. I'm off to find my cousin, you want to come?"

Blaise shouldered his book bag. "No-one goes anywhere alone, even in the time it'll take to catch up to Potter. I'll go with you."

Theo spotted another Slytherin entering the library and shook his head. "I'll stick around for a bit. I'll go back to the Common Room with Ophelia when she leaves."

They temporarily parted ways. Tracing Harry's footsteps (and the portraits muttering about 'insolent boys these days') Roisin and Blaise went down a corridor, up a flight of stairs, and caught up with Harry in a darker corridor with the torches blown out by the winter wind. Letting go of Blaise's hand, Roisin touched Harry's shoulder. "Hey. Everything all right?"

Harry didn't bother to deny it. "No. More Heir of Slytherin bull going around. I'm just getting so sick of it! I mean, 'Gryffindor's Golden Boy', here, why do they think I'm the Heir of Slytherin? I don't give a damn how pure Ernie's blood is! I may not like the Dursleys, (sorry Roisin, you know I'm not counting you) but that doesn't mean I'm going to go around killing muggle-borns. For God's sake, Hermione's a muggle-born!"

Roisin patted his arm sympathetically, determined to cheer him up. "Don't worry, you're not alone. Apparently, we've joined forces and are using each other to divert suspicion." She smirked and tossed her hair dramatically. "As if I'd limit myself to just a school! Besides, I hit people where it'll last and hurt. Petrification is far too easily cured."

The objective was achieved. Harry snickered. Blaise joined him. "Anyway, - "

Whatever Harry had been about to say was cut off as they both tripped over something in the middle of the Hallway. Looking to see what it was, Roisin felt the blood draining from her face. Justin Finch-Fletchly was lying on the stone floor, ridged and cold, with a look of shock frozen on his face.

Above him, was the strangest sight any of the three present had ever seen. Sir Nicolas de Mimsy-whatsit, a.k.a Nearly Headless Nick, the Gryffindor Ghost, floated stiff and horizontal about six inches off the floor. He was no longer a pearly white colour, but black and smoky.

Frozen in horror and feeling ready to faint, Roisin was broken out of her trance by Blaise shaking her. "Rose! Stay with me, now. We can't be found here, any of us!"

Roisin nodded and grabbed Harry's arm as Blaise cast a disillusionment charm on himself. He faded out of sight just as Murphy's Law kicked in and Peeves made an appearance, screaming the news about another attack.

Hearing an "oof" from Blaise's general direction as a crowd swarmed into the hallway, cutting him off from her, Roisin could only close her eyes and hope for the best.

Unfortunately, it seemed that Puck was the only one listening, and didn't seem to be in an obliging mood. For several minutes, there was nothing but confusion, and then Professor McGonagall arrived on the scene. A loud blast from her wand silenced the crowd, but no sooner had Roisin felt the touch of an invisible hand through the thinning crowd when the Hufflepuffs from the library arrived.

Ernie was in the lead, and immediately zeroed in on Harry and Roisin. "Caught in the act!"

Not for the first time, Roisin was extremely grateful for Professor McGonagall's unyielding visage as she snapped at both the Hufflepuffs and at Peeves to be quiet. No one argued with a snappish Professor McGonagall.

Justin Finch-Fletchly and Sir Nicholas were taken to the Hospital Wing, while Roisin and Harry were lead away by Professor McGonagall.

Catching a now visible Blaise out of the corner of her eye, now accompanied by Theo and Ophelia, Roisin flickered a discreet hand signal, indicating to get Professor Snape. The other Slytherins left quietly but quickly as Roisin followed her cousin and the Deputy Headmistress around the corner to in front of a particularly ugly gargyle.

It jumped to the side when Professor McGonagall said “Sherbet Lemon”, which was apparently a password, revealing a spiral staircase, which lead up to a gleaming oak door with a brass knocker in the shape of a griffin.

Roisin winced. This must be Dumbledore’s office.

Professor McGonagall ushered them inside and left them to wait. Roisin collapsed onto a chair and tried to calm herself down as Harry looked around the office, inspecting the portraits of previous Headmasters and Headmistresses, most of whom appeared to be taking naps.

Last year had proven that Professor Dumbledore didn’t care about how the Slytherins were treated, even indirectly humiliating them himself, as long as his precious Gryffindors were safe and happy. As a second person at the scene of a crime, Roisin wouldn’t be in the least surprised if she was left with the blame to make things easier for Harry. Roisin hoped that Blaise and the others had managed to contact Professor Snape.

But nothing would help her if she didn’t calm down, and hysterics could easily be taken as an admission of guilt. Taking a deep breath, she cleared her mind and tried to relax. She had just managed to school herself back into appropriate Slytherin Serenity when Harry walked over to the raggedy old Sorting Hat and put it on again. Roisin had just decided that she didn’t want to know when Harry took the hat off again and informed it that he didn’t belong in Slytherin.

Roisin nearly fell off her chair! Ok, that she really did want to know! “Harry, what the hell is that thing on about?”

Harry had apparently forgotten that she was in the room, and was obviously trying to think of the best way to either evade or explain the answer when both children were distracted by a strange gagging noise.

Roisin leapt out of her chair, (at the moment, and until the who Petrification mess was sorted out, Paranoia was her friend) and they both looked around for the source. It turned out to be a decrepid and ragged-looking bird on a golden perch, looking at them balefully. If

one tilted their head slightly, the bird bore a slight resemblance to the Weasley's Post-Owl, Errol. However, this bird was built more along the lines of a cross between an eagle and a swan than an owl, so it was probably magical.

Just as Roisin was starting to think of possible magical birds, the topic became largely irrelevant as the thing burst into flames, quickly turning into a fireball, and in seconds, reduced to nothing but a pile of ashes. Roisin closed her eyes. Not only were she and Harry found at the scene of the latest Petrification, now Dumbledore's pet burst into flames while they were the only ones present. This was only going to make things worse.

Before she could even start to think of a solution, the office door opened and Professor Dumbledore entered, looking very sombre. Harry began to stumble over an explanation, but Dumbledore only smiled. "About time too. He's been looking dreadful for days, I've been telling him to get a move on."

There was no mirror handy to check, but Roisin had a strong suspicion that she looked completely gob smacked. She took comfort in the fact that Harry looked equally stunned and that Dumbledore was nice enough to not laugh too hard before explaining. "Fawkes is a phoenix, Harry. They burst into flames when it is time for them to die, and are re-born from the ashes."

Dumbledore indicated the pile of ashes and Roisin turned to look, just in time to see a baby chick poke its head out. Knowing that almost all newborn creatures, human or animal, are wrinkled and ugly when they enter the world, Roisin swooped over to examine the chick, cooing over it as Dumbledore continued his explanation.

She was interrupted by Harry poking her, and turned to realize that Dumbledore had already sat down behind his desk and was waiting for an explanation. Joining her cousin on the small lounge, Roisin looked at her hands and waited.

Before the Headmaster could say anything, however, the door burst open to reveal a frantic Hagrid, holding a dead rooster and with a wild

look in his eyes. “It wasn’t him, Professor Dumbledore! I was talking to Harry seconds before that kid was found! He never had time...”

Ducking the dead rooster that Hagrid was now waving around, Roisin saw Professor Snape slip into the office. She was probably the only one, however, as Hagrid was still protesting Harry’s Innocence. “It can’t have been him; I’ll swear it to the Ministry of Magic if I have to...”

Dumbledore tried to get a word in. “Hagrid, I –“

Hagrid continued, obviously desperate to keep Harry safe. “You’ve got the wrong boy, sir, I know Harry never...”

Finally, Dumbledore managed to get a word in with a very loud “Hagrid! I do not believe that Harry attacked these people.”

This stopped Hagrid short, and he looked faintly embarrassed. “Oh. Right. I’ll just wait outside, then.”

The Groundskeeper stomped out, and Roisin caught her Head of House hiding a smirk as he stepped out of the shadows. At this point, Dumbledore was reassuring Harry that he did not think him guilty, and Roisin took the chance to go over and examine the events of the past hour.

First: The ‘Monster of Slytherin’ was obviously a lot more dangerous than had everyone had previously thought, if it could petrify a ghost.

Second: The victims were both Muggle borns, and Roisin had overheard Harry talking about Filch being a squib. A pattern was forming, but she needed more to confirm it.

Third: The current nervousness over the attacks was going to escalate into a panic before the day was out. Roisin would need to be very careful, and would probably need an alibi just for visiting the WC.

Fourth: It seemed she had mis-judged Hagrid. Before, Roisin had shared the almost school-wide view that Hagrid was just a well-meaning oaf. Now, she found herself re-evaluating that opinion.

Hagrid may or may not be the brightest star in the sky, but he obviously cared about Harry, if he was willing to barge in and yell at the Headmaster. Roisin resolved to be nicer to Hagrid in the future.

Fifth: She needed to pay more attention to what was going on around her. The Headmaster had finished questioning Harry, and it seemed that they were both dismissed, although Roisin had the feeling that she was going to be under close watch for a while. Roisin couldn't wait to get out of there, and was out of her seat before Professor Snape could even open his mouth to summon her.

Using the Headmaster's fireplace, Professor Snape flooded both Roisin and himself down to his own office. Once out of sight, Roisin burst into tears of relief and stress, clinging to her Head of House.

Showing the compassionate side that only the Slytherins ever saw, Professor Snape waited until Roisin got herself mostly under control, and then offered a calming draught. Guiding her back to the Slytherin Common Room, Professor Snape left her in the care of her frantic House Mates.

Demetra snapped her fingers for a House Elf, ordering a pitcher of Hot Chocolate and several mugs. Blaise and Theo had obviously filled everyone in on what they knew, and the entire House was on the edge of their seats waiting for the results. Even if a Slytherin didn't have a personal interest in what happened to Roisin, any negative consequences could spell lasting damage to Slytherin House as a whole.

As it turned out, Roisin was right, and the Rumour Mill had everything blown out of proportion, and everyone in full-blown hysteria. Professor McGonagall's office door was nearly pounded down as nearly all of those who had previously signed up to stay at Hogwarts over the Holidays were now begging to change their minds.

As always, however, there were one or two exceptions. Sally Roseworthy, a Fourth Year, had pointed out that anyone who stayed behind would be even more suspect than usual. Draco said that he would rather have people whispering about him than spend a single hour with his overseas relations. Roisin had the sense not to point out the similarities between his motives for staying and Harry's, as it

would only cause a tantrum. The Weasleys and Granger were also staying behind, Ron openly for Harry's moral support, the twins and girl-Weasley so that they didn't have to visit one of their other brothers, and the Prefect because he considered it his 'duty'.

Roisin was sure that Ron had a secondary motive, however, as Gryffindors couldn't lie to save their lives, and she had seen those 'Innocent' expressions often enough on her own Housemates and brother not to be suspicious that the Golden Trio were Up To Something.

Either way, it was with great relief that Roisin watched the term draw to a close, and looked forward to the relative peace and quiet of the O'Conner Keep.

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A/N: Sorry I've taken so long to update, but with end-of-year tests, two family birthdays, organizing my Mum's 50th party, several other fics and a multitude of other things, I've had absolutely no time to write.

Anyway, consider it a Christmas present before I go on vacation. Hopefully I won't take so long to update next time.

You know the drill, so drop a review.

Merry Christmas,

Nat

Disclaimer: If I owned it, I would be lounging on a beach in the sub-tropics, or somewhere in Ireland. As I am not, and am stuck in TAFE for the foreseeable future, Harry Potter still belongs to JKR.

Summary: See previous chapter.

Note: On a slightly related tangent, one of my original poems has been published! It can be found under 'Magic Spells and Wishing Wells', along with several other works from other writers, in a poetry book titled Immortal Verses. Yes, I have spent the past few weeks gloating over this fact. If anyone is interested in reading it, drop a message or a review, along with your contact details.

Chapter Eight

The Hogwarts Express was unusually quiet as it departed to take students home for Christmas. Still, Roisin didn't let it dampen her delight at going home, and kept a close eye on Mary and Seamus, who were bouncing with energy. Finally giving up on the possibility of ever getting them to sit still, Roisin left them with Desdemona (might as well keep the potential trouble in one spot) and wandered off in search of Blaise and some quiet conversation.

Having just managed to rid himself of Draco, Crabbe and Goyle, none of whom were particularly conducive to intelligent and non-egotistical conversation, Blaise was more than happy to oblige, and the rest of the journey was spent in a lively debate on Potions vs. other branches of Magic.

When they finally reached London, Roisin was glad to see not only Fionna, but also Michael and Nessa. After collecting luggage and bidding farewell to friends, they port keyed back to the O'Conner Keep, landing right in the middle of a rainstorm.

After being subjected to numerous drying charms, Roisin went upstairs to unpack. Placing her clothing in the closet, Roisin made a mental note to look up waterproofing charms and put them on everything she owned. There were distinct disadvantages to living on an island that always bore the brunt of the Atlantic Ocean's bad moods.

The storm continued over that night and the next day, showing no signs of letting up and leaving people virtually confined indoors

except for the most vital tasks. Roisin and the twins used the opportunity to finish their holiday homework.

Two days into the holidays, Roisin was just working on the conclusion to her Charms Essay when there was a knock at the door. Expecting it to be Mary or Seamus with another 'I accidentally left at Hogwarts. Can I borrow yours?' request, Roisin didn't look up as she called for the visitor to come in.

Inattention aside, Roisin was justifiably surprised to see Michael, Nessa and her grandmother entering her chamber, all looking unusually serious. With the slight paranoia that came with being a Slytherin, Roisin found herself worried. "Is everything all right?"

Nessa transfigured a flower vase and two candles into chairs, and motioned for Roisin to join them. Now feeling very apprehensive, Roisin complied, looking around with a confused expression. Fionna was the one to take pity on her and start the explanation. "It's about the Dursleys, and about your place here."

Roisin paled. When she had done her first conscious magic at the age of six, her parents had acted very stiff around her for over a month, even refusing to look at her sometimes. Despite the warm acceptance of her extended family, and repeated assurance that she would always have a place in the Magical world and especially O'Conner Keep, her parent's reaction, along with the rest of her Muggle family's intolerance for anything unusual, had left her with a mostly ignored but deep insecurity of peoples reactions if she did anything unusual.

Had something happened to make them regret that assurance? Did they plan to send her back to Privet Drive for some unknown transgression? Had her parents come up with some way to forbid her any contact with the Magical world, despite their obvious wish that she, and any trace of magic, stay as far away from them as possible?

Her concern did not go un-noticed, and Nessa hastened to reassure her. "Don't worry, dear, it's nothing bad. We aren't trying to make you go back to the muggles, if that's what you're worried about."

Since that had been Roisin's main concern, she visibly relaxed. Fionna continued. "It's about what happened last summer. Locking you in your room and feeding you through a cat-flap counts as abuse of a minor. We are doing our best to get you away from them, but it is slow going."

Michael took up the explanation. "Fionna is your guardian in the Magical world, as is usual for any squib-born with adult magical relations within three generations, but the Dursleys are still your legal guardians in the Muggle world, and as your biological parents, have the greater claim to you."

Fionna took over again. "If we can find sufficient grounds and supporting evidence, we can have them declared unfit parents, and remove you from their custody. Harry also. You claim that he was forced to sleep in a cupboard until his letter came. Is there anything else?"

Roisin bit her lip. "Nothing off the top of my head, and you'll probably have a hard time with the cupboard, even." She acknowledged the quizzical looks. "My parents needed some way to explain how strange things kept happening around Harry, so they spread the rumor that he was mentally unstable. Local authorities and anyone who knows us will explain it away as some kind of bid for attention. I told you about the bars on the window, but that was an under the table, cash only job. You'll find no records of it, and the damage from them being ripped out is probably repaired by now. There is also very little proof of me being locked up, and until my letter came, I was my parent's co-pride and joy. Add that I've never been the most social of people, my best muggle friend was away on a family vacation at the time, and that I had just returned from a very prestigious but demanding boarding school, and people probably just thought I was getting my summer schoolwork out of the way early. My brother may be an easily intimidated idiot, but he's smart enough not to say anything that might land him or my parents in trouble. Besides, everyone views them as fine, upstanding members of the community, so I don't think that there is a lot anyone can do to get me away from them."

Nessa slowly nodded. “And unless we can come up with something legal and binding in the Muggle world, there are going to be questions about why you have suddenly seemed to disappear off the face of the earth. There would also need to be a very good reason for you to have left the country to permanently stay with your eccentric grandmother, rather than your loving parents.”

Fionna narrowed her eyes slightly. “I’m Vernon’s mother; I know several things that he would very much prefer never became common knowledge. I can’t get them to hand you over completely, but I can convince them to let you stay for at least part of the summer holidays, and since Hogwarts has their permission to visit friends during the holidays on record, for all they know, you are spending Christmas and Easter at Hogwarts. We will keep looking, but for now, that may have to do.”

Roisin blinked twice. “You’d blackmail your own children? You sound like you are on the verge of disowning them for being muggles.”

Fionna shook her head. “I defied my family and risked being cast out by marrying a muggle-born wizard. In a number of the more conservative families, a child could be disowned or disinherited for not having magic, but that is beside the point. I will not claim a child who would abuse their own kin, and if I have to resort to drastic measures to ensure your safety, then I will.”

Roisin jumped up from her chair and hugged her grandmother, who returned it, stern expression melting into a fond smile. Nessa joined the embrace while Michael un-transfigured the chairs back into a vase and candles. It was, as Roisin’s friend Lorna would put it, a Kodak Moment.

Of course, the ‘Kodak Moment’ was broken by a quick knock and the entrance of Mary and Seamus. “Hey, Roisin, can we – ah.”

Roisin smirked and rolled her eyes as the twins spotted their parents. It was good to be among family.

The next day, Roisin found another reason to be glad about family. Aiden had recently turned seventeen, the legal age in England, and had been eavesdropping on the conversation about the Dursleys. He

had also mentioned it to one of Roisin's older friends, who was also seventeen. The two had talked about it and decided that there were practical measures, and then there was retaliation.

Aiden had come to visit Roisin with the aforementioned friend, Aoibhe, and mentioned that they had overheard the discussion. "Mother and Father are taking steps, I know, but we feel that more extreme measures need to be taken, just in case they lose the battle. You can't do anything outside of the wards yet, but we'll take any requests."

Roisin smiled faintly. Logic and Maturity said to let Fionna, Michael and Nessa handle it, and not stoop to the Dursley's level and curse them by way of petty revenge.

On the other hand, Logic and Maturity were vastly over-rated at times. Also, potential disciplinary parties (Micheal and Nessa) were feeling less than charitable toward the Dursleys, and since Aiden and Aoibhe were doing the dirty work, Roisin wouldn't be blamed. "I have no idea where you went and never saw you leave."

Aiden and Aoibhe smirked. "We'll bring back pictures."

The storm let up on the 18th, and after several hours drying out, life resumed as normal. Aiden and Aoibhe had returned, looking very satisfied and with photographic evidence of their 'visit' to the Dursleys. There were, Roisin decided, some definite advantages to having overprotective friends and relations.

Staying at the Keep was wonderful, as always, but there was one downside. Many of the girls Roisin's age had entered the 'boy-craze' stage of life early, so Roisin spent time with either the older, more sensible girls, the few age mates who didn't spend the entire time giggling, or the younger children, who simply assumed that hiding from the giggle-squad was a simply a more complex version of hide-and-seek.

Seamus joined the other boys on December 26th, spending the day on the wren hunt. Girls would occasionally join the boys on the Hunt, but as she was now grown up and attending Hogwarts, Mary felt that she no longer counted as a 'young' girl, and stayed out of the hunt.

Fionna had also decided that Roisin needed to learn how to dance and had started to teach her. With riding, various other activities and writing to her Hogwarts friends, Roisin could safely say that she was never bored.

Blaise had managed to avoid visiting Italy these holidays, and had formed some sort of alliance/roster with the rest of their year (excluding Draco, Crabbe and Goyle) to keep Desdemona away from any sugar-based treats at the parties that were regularly held over the holidays.

Roisin had also received a slightly frantic letter from Crabbe, who had apparently been sent a letter informing him that his parents were considering possible matches for him. Having yet to start notice noticing girls, Crabbe had promptly written to all his friends in a panic, especially the girls, practically begging for advice. Given Crabbe's lack of popularity with nearly everyone, Roisin had found it vastly funny, but tried to keep the amusement out of her letter as she wrote back, urging him to calm down and stop worrying. His parents were only considering, after all, and there was plenty of time for him to get to know the girl, in the unlikely event that they did make a match, and if necessary, change his parent's minds.

Before she knew it, the holidays were over and Roisin, Seamus and Mary were on the train back to Hogwarts.

The first day of term, Roisin was in the Hospital Wing, cursing Peeves to wherever Poltergeists go and back.

The wretched thing had gone and covered the corridor outside the Slytherin Common Room in oil and ice, resulting in injuries for the first few out of the door in the morning. Two Seventh Years and Mercutio Moon had wound up with hairline fractures, and were out in a few hours. Roisin, on the other hand, had nearly stopped in time before Goyle had run into her from behind and both second years had toppled over with a painful crash. As a result, Roisin had come off somewhat worse, with a broken arm and mild concussion, and required a slightly longer stay.

There was one interesting thing, though. Someone else was in the Hospital Wing, too, and the privacy curtains hadn't come down once, even to eat, a fact that would spark anyone's interest. Curiosity was

not always a good thing, but when Madam Pomfrey flooded away to request some complex potions from Professor Snape, Roisin decided to indulge herself.

Professor Snape would be five minutes before finishing his first year Slytherin/Gryffindor class, which according to Mary and Seamus, always took a few extra minutes. Then again, any class that involved Gryffindor/Slytherin took extra time for the teacher to recover before facing their next class.

This, coupled with Pomfrey having to specify which potions she wanted, in what quantity and potency, what time frame and other details, promised at least fifteen minutes to see what or who was behind the privacy curtains and get safely back to her bed before the Matron returned.

Upon seeing what was behind the curtains, Roisin decided that commenting about 'Curiosity and the Cat' would be a bit too harsh, not to mention a terrible pun, and settled with open-mouthed staring. Well, this certainly explained why the privacy curtains were up!

The brains of Gryffindor was now covered in black fur, with yellow eyes, black ears and a long, black tail.

Fortunately, she seemed to be asleep, and Roisin escaped back to her bed as fast as was sensibly possible. Unfortunately, her haste made her just loud enough to wake Hermione up, resulting in a verbal sparring match deteriorating into insults such as 'inbred, blood-obsessed snob' and 'did someone botch a transfiguration charm give your hair the properties of a bush?'. Luckily, Madam Pomfrey returned before they started throwing hexes.

After what seemed like hours of tests, Madam Pomfrey declared Roisin Healthy, but wanted her to stay an extra day for observation. Roisin tried to protest, but was calmly ignored. This was followed by a very distinct snicker from Hermione's general direction. Roisin narrowed her eyes. Was the Know-It-All actively trying to piss her off?

Blaise and Desdemona visited after dinner, accompanied by the twins, with the aim of sneaking her some dessert and handing over that

day's homework and a copy of the class notes. Desperate for someone to talk to, Roisin put it to the side and started asking questions about what had happened while she had been stuck in the Hospital. Blaise started a narration of the days events, inter-spaced with his own sarcastic remarks, while Roisin listened and waited for Desdemona to notice the Privacy curtains.

Desdemona may have been a fairly average student, but no one could claim that she wasn't observant. It took her all of a minute to notice the curtains, then the admirable restraint of an extra three until she cracked and asked why they were there.

Lowering her voice to a whisper, Roisin explained in vivid detail, and made them promise not to tell anyone outside their room-mates. As Mary was roomed with an incurable gossip, and Draco would feel the need to laugh about it to everyone he met, it was safe to say that rumors would be all over the school by lunch tomorrow.

After escaping the Hospital Wing, life returned to more or less normal, although Slytherin House remained on high alert at all times. Just because there had been no attacks in the past six weeks didn't mean the rest of the school wasn't waiting to accuse anyone who showed even the slightest bit of suspicious behavior, and didn't have at least two witnesses to their location at all times.

Hostilities even continued through the Imbolc celebration, to the extent that the Slytherin girls finally threw up their hands and celebrated away from the other houses. This time, Roisin and Mary laid out their school robes for the goddess to bless. With things as they were, they wanted luck and protection every moment that they might be in contact with any other castle resident.

They continued to receive schoolwork, and threw themselves into it with an enthusiasm that led to jokes about closet Ravenclaws. Then again, even the teachers were not above the suspicion and paranoia gripping Hogwarts, and more than one student had complained of being marked down. Whether this was by accident or design was beside the point; if the Slytherins were going to be kicked out of Hogwarts, it was not going to be for failure in their academic studies.

The sole exception to this diligent practice was Defense Against the Dark Arts. Lockhart would pass anyone who threw in enough flattery about the Greatness of Gilderoy, and had no concept of subtlety.

For this reason, the Slytherins were now holding a weekly contest to see who could come up with the best DADA homework essay, and an overall prize to be given at the end of the year. Points were given for outrageous compliments, subtle insinuations, and unobtrusive pointing out of inconsistencies in the textbooks. Bonus points were awarded for innuendos about Lockhart's sexual preferences and/or immediate ancestry and actually getting away with it. Extra credit was given on the content of essays before the contest had started, responses to the pop quiz in Lockhart's first lesson, and whatever else One could come up with.

Roisin had an impressive lead, having gained a lot of Extra Credit by 'accidentally' adding an extra paragraph written in Irish Gaelic. Lockhart had ignored it, but the Slytherin Prefects had used a translation charm and discovered it to be a very detailed 'Ten Things I Hate About You' list.

Blaise, Pansy and Draco were tied for second place, however, while Theo and Millicent were exploring previously undiscovered depths of sarcasm. Unfortunately, the two of them had been a bit too enthusiastic in utilizing their newfound skills, and been caught by Lockhart.

Desdemona had taken a different route and not bothered with subtlety. Lockhart had been outraged and taken a visibly unrepentant Desdemona to speak to Professor Snape, who had simply waited until Lockhart was out of the room before awarding Slytherin fifty points for excellence.

Harry had found it very amusing when Roisin told him, and passed it on to the Weasley Twins, who were rumored to have adopted the idea among their own classmates.

The mandrakes were reported to be coming along nicely, having turned moody and secretive. In their Herbology lesson, Professor Sprout explained that as soon as the Mandrake's acne cleared up,

they would be ready for re-potting, and then it would only be a few more months until the Petrified students would be restored.

Meanwhile, Lockhart was strutting around as though he were personally responsible for the cessation of the attacks. The Defense lessons had finally moved away from re-enacting Lockhart's exploits, but there was a debate as to whether or not that had been preferable to listening as Lockhart constantly explained why the Monster had stopped attacking. If Roisin had to sit through one more lecture about how "The dastardly beast must have known I was onto it, and fled rather than face my wrath" something was going to get violently hexed.

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A/N: OK, another chapter up, sorry about the wait. I'm going overseas on the 18th, but I'll try to have the next chapter up before then. It's half written already, so don't worry.

Chapter 19 had 94 hits, but only two reviews. I'm not fishing for compliments, but it helps if people tell me what they like or didn't like, and point out any errors I make. Much appreciated.

Thanks,

Nat.

Disclaimer: Not again! I don't own Harry Potter.

Summary: See Previous chapters.

Note: I got a message asking about the chapter numbers. To answer, I am numbering the chapters by year, so this chapter is chapter nine of Year Two.

Chapter Nine

While trying to tune out Lockhart's continued self-praise for stopping the attacks, the Slytherin Second Years, at least, had missed a Very Important Piece of Information. Apparently, Lockhart was convinced that all Hogwarts needed was a good Morale Booster.

The Slytherins discovered this fact on Valentine's Day, when they walked into the Great Hall for breakfast, only to find it covered in pink and red decorations, with heart-shaped confetti raining down from the ceiling. After several seconds in horrified, frozen silence, the Seventh Year Prefects ran to where Professor Snape sat at the High Table. Roisin wasn't sure that there was a word to describe her Head of House's expression.

It didn't take much to convince him to put up a shield to keep the confetti off Slytherin table, but Dumbledore intervened before they could start to get rid of the decorations, sending the Slytherins back to their table amid wailed pleas and protests. Roisin was sure she heard Demetra mutter something about therapy.

Well, they weren't allowed to do anything about the decorations as a whole, but the whole 'he loves me, he loves me not' with the flower arrangements was acceptable. Besides, it wasn't like anyone minded if the petal plucking was more ripped handfuls, or if the entire arrangement was accidentally hit with a vanishing charm, rather than just the flower.

There was more than one admonishing glare directed at the Slytherin table, but really, if a stray spell made the sickeningly pink ribbons and banners catch on fire, then could you blame the students for pulling them down and stamping on them?

The other House tables were leaving their decorations alone, but few of them looked very happy about it. Looking to the front of the Hall,

Roisin could see only four professors who didn't look visibly annoyed with it all.

Professor McGonagall had a muscle twitching in her cheek, but otherwise appeared calm. Dumbledore was looking as infuriatingly cheerful as always, completely ignoring everyone else's response. The Divination Professor didn't look overly bothered, but that wasn't too surprising, as a number of students had commented that she was never bothered by anything that she hadn't 'seen' in her crystal ball.

The fourth Professor was Lockhart, who was wearing lurid pink robes to match the decorations and had obviously orchestrated the whole disaster. Who was now waving his arms for silence. Roisin would be very surprised if he managed avoid being hexed before lunch.

Lockhart stood up, smiling. "Happy Valentine's Day!" he shouted, oblivious to the glares, "and may I thank the forty-six people who have so far sent me cards! Yes, I have arranged this little surprise for all of you – and it doesn't end here!"

Roisin couldn't stop a quiet whimper from escaping. He had already announced that the collective IQ of Hogwarts had dropped far enough for forty-six people to have sent the imbecile Valentine's Cards! How could it possibly get worse than this?

Similar sentiments were echoed up and down the table, and not a few on the other tables, as well. The students found out when Lockhart clapped his hands and the door leading to the Entrance Hall opened to reveal around a dozen decidedly surly-looking dwarves, all wearing golden wings and carrying harps. Since no self-respecting Dwarf would willingly wear such an outfit, Roisin instantly forgave them all blame in the upcoming events. With Lockhart involved, there was little chance of it being anything short of a disaster, as his next words confirmed. "My friendly, card-carrying cupids!" Lockhart shouted. "They will be roving around the school today collecting your Valentines!"

Roisin exchanged horrified looks with her friends. They had sent each other Valentine's Day cards as friends, as many other students did, but that didn't mean they wanted it shouted all over the school! Their reputation would be ruined! Never mind that both Roisin and Pansy

had personally written the Valentines to Blaise and Draco, respectively, this was going to be horrible! Roisin was no stranger to ignoring taunts and slurs, but the last thing she wanted was to expose Blaise to what any boy would consider public humiliation.

Millicent looked almost ready to faint, a surprising look for the usually tough girl. Desdemona seemed to have gone into a state of shock, and the boys didn't look much better as Lockhart continued. "The fun doesn't stop here! I'm sure my colleagues will want to get into the spirit of the occasion!" (Roisin was sure that they wouldn't) "Why not ask Professor Snape to whip you up a Love Potion? And while you're at it, Professor Flitwick knows more about Entrancing Enchantments than anyone I've met!"

Professor Flitwick was also an ex-dueling champion, and from his earlier expression, now hidden by his hands, Roisin was sure that asking him for anything related to love charms would be a Very Bad Idea.

Love Potions were also Completely Out Of The Question. Even disregarding the fact that they were illegal, asking the dour Professor Snape for a Love Potion would be simply asking for a slow and painful death.

Lessons that day were a complete and total waste of time. For a start, the 'cupid' dwarves kept barging in to 'serenade' students with Valentines. For another, half the students were missing, hiding to avoid either receiving a Valentine or to avoid the humiliation of being revealed to have sent one.

Roisin had seen the effects of both. On the way to Charms after lunch, Harry had received a Valentine from Ginny Weasley. The girl probably had several talents, but writing poetry was not one of them. With descriptions like 'eyes as green as a fresh pickled toad' and hair as 'dark as a blackboard', Roisin could hardly blame him for looking ready to die of embarrassment.

Blaise and Pansy had fallen victim to the other side of the scale. Seeing Draco's taunting reaction to Harry's predicament, Pansy had decided to save herself the humiliation by locking herself in the Girl's

Dorms and barricading the door. Just after Charms, Blaise had followed her example when a Dwarf interrupted the lesson.

Seeing the Dwarf headed toward Roisin, Blaise had gone pale, and tried to hide behind Theo as the 'cupid' announced a Valentine for Roisin. He had looked ready to die as the wretched thing plucked its harp and began.

" 'Twas on the train I came upon her,
Sweet and proud as she smiled at me.
Her long dark hair fell all around her,
Her eyes as wild as a storm-tossed sea.
With mind and strength and beauty bright,
My friendship will be forever true.
My affection is as great as the stars that shine,
So will you return my regard for you?"

Roisin had found it very thoughtful that Blaise had found a verse from one of her favorite books and adapted it for her, but if the riotous laughter was any indication, the rest of the male bystanders didn't agree.

Thankfully, the dwarves were gone by dinner, but prying Blaise and Pansy out of their rooms to eat still took nearly an hour of coaxing and reassurance that they wouldn't laugh and the valentines had been very nice and thoughtful of them.

If Roisin got anywhere near Lockhart without potential witnesses (potential accomplices didn't count), the results were not going to be pretty.

Lockhart's latest cruel and unusual idea/experiment aside, things were slowly starting to look up.

Four months had passed since Justin Finch-Fletchly had been Petrified, and people were starting to think that the monster had retired for good. Roisin was still viewed with suspicion, but it was now back to the normal 'Slytherins-are-Scum' suspicion, rather than the previous 'She's-helping-Petrify-people' suspicion.

The Hufflepuffs had backed off, and Peeves had finally gotten bored with his 'Oh Potter/O'Conner, you rotter' routine. Best of all, the

mandrakes had thrown a wild and raucous party in the greenhouse at the beginning of March. While it left the rest of the castle with a two-day headache, Professor Sprout was delighted. "As soon as they start trying to move into each other's pots, we'll know they're fully mature." She had announced. "Then we'll be able to revive those poor people in the Hospital Wing."

As with last year, Roisin and Millicent celebrated their Birthdays together. Mary and Seamus had given both one of a set of pendants that would alert each other if the bearer of one was in danger. Desdemona and Millicent had banded together to 'borrow' Roisin's photo album and add to it, along with humorous comments. Roisin had given Millicent a copy of *The Hobbit*, which Millicent had found very amusing. Draco had commented on the wisdom of calling Giant Spiders 'attercop', but was ignored. Pansy and Blaise had each added a charm to add to the bracelet they had been given last year. Pansy had given Roisin a rose and Millicent a bay leaf, while Blaise had found an intricately wrought celestial scene, consisting of sun, moon and stars. Theo had given Roisin a copy of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, and Crabbe and Goyle had gifted her with a packet of Droobles Best Blowing Gum.

Roisin didn't really care for gum, but it would be nice to stick some on Lockhart's chair or something during their next Defense Lesson. She still owed him for Blaise acting skittish around her for weeks after Valentine's Day.

Easter Holidays drew closer, and the Slytherins had finally managed to mostly repress the memories of the Valentine's Day fiasco, though it had taken a very long time.

This was greatly helped by the fact that the Second Years, at least, now had to concentrate on picking their electives for next year. It wasn't that the subject descriptions were difficult, but it seemed that everyone wanted to offer advice on what to take. Divination sounded interesting, but also very unreliable, and the Professor was reported to be an absolute idiot. Arithmancy seemed to deal with numbers in relation to magic, including, to an extent, a lesser form of divination. Study of Ancient Runes dealt mainly with the runes used in England, but also dabbled in Nordic Runes, hieroglyphs and even some Sumerian and Babylonian.

Care of Magical Creatures sounded all right, though Professor Kettleburn was reputed to be a bit of an enthusiast. There was Muggle Studies, but Roisin didn't see the point, as she was Muggle Raised, and from the Curriculum example, the Wizarding World's information was almost a century out of date, if not more. Roisin would probably be a better teacher than the Current Professor, who insisted that most Muggles used horses or carriages to travel long distances.

There were other courses, such as Household magic, Business or Politics, but these could also be studied as a series of workshops in Sixth Year, so unless you planned to be the Minister of Magic or to immediately marry and become a stay-at-home mother, most opted for the workshops.

You could pick two or three, and Roisin eventually decided on Arithmancy, Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures. Most of the other Second Years decided on the same or similar variations, although Goyle ended up closing his eyes and poking his wand at the elective sheet, then signing up for whatever ones he hit. Desdemona and Theo both signed up for Divination, but when Desdemona started urging others to do the same, Pansy finally threw down her quill and informed her that she didn't need a crystal ball to see that Desdemona was going to get hexed if she didn't sit down and be quiet.

Life at Hogwarts continued, and the second-to-last Quidditch match, deciding whether or not a House would go on to the final match for the cup, was fast approaching. Given the two playing, Slytherin would be attending, if only to throw taunts. It was Gryffindor vs. Hufflepuff, and since Harry wasn't in the Hospital Wing recovering from a fight against Voldemort, Roisin would also be making one of her rare appearances.

The day of the match dawned bright and sunny; almost perfect conditions for a match. The Quidditch players were looking especially nervous at breakfast, but still managed to eat heartily. Of course, Gryffindor Captain Oliver Wood looked like he would force-feed his team if they didn't eat, so the Lions might have been stuffing themselves as more of a defense measure.

The few hours between breakfast and the match were spent outside, enjoying the sunshine and playing Exploding Snap. Roisin was admittedly hopeless at the game, and contented herself with alternating between a book and watching and making sardonic remarks when something caught on fire.

At eleven o'clock, they packed away the cards and headed toward the Quidditch Pitch. Halfway there, Roisin was tying her hair into a ponytail (the height of the stands and the players zooming around made it bad for loose hair) when she realized that she was missing her protective necklace that her cousins had given her for her birthday.

Muttering something rude under her breath, Roisin informed her friends that she needed to run back to the Dorms for her necklace. Theo had pointed out that no-one was going to attack when the entire school was out on the Quidditch Pitch, but it would only take a few minutes, so Roisin started toward the castle, asking them to save her a seat. She would easily be back in time for the match to start.

Roisin had grabbed her necklace from her room and was racing back toward the Quidditch pitch when she collided with Hermione Granger. Helping the Gryffindor up, Roisin was about to continue when the other girl shouted, "Wait! The monster is a basilisk; you can't look it in the eye!"

What in the nine hells...? Roisin whirled around. "Are you sure? But how come nobody had died, if that's the case?"

Hermione didn't slow down in the explanation. "If no one looked at it directly, then they would have only been Petrified. Colin saw it through the camera, the area where they found Mrs. Norris was partly flooded..."

Hermione was turning blue, and finally stopped to draw breath, while Roisin continued the line of thought. "Justin was found with Nearly Headless Nick. If he saw the basilisk through the ghost..."

Hermione nodded, but before she could speak again, they were interrupted by a Ravenclaw Prefect. "What are you two doing here? Shouldn't you be at the match with your friends?"

The prefect began to steer them outside, but Hermione stopped her when they were about to turn the corner. "Look around the corner with a mirror first."

The Ravenclaw looked annoyed and was ready to start telling Hermione off. Roisin sighed in exasperation. "Just do it. All that happens is that we take a few extra minutes to get there. We still have time."

The prefect muttered something uncomplimentary, but fished a small mirror out of her pocket and held it out, tilting it at an angle to see around the corner.

The last thing Roisin saw was the reflection of two huge yellow eyes.

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A/N: Thought this was a good place to end it...

Anyway, another chapter is up. Sorry it's short, but I'm going overseas tomorrow, and won't have computer access for about three weeks. The Valentine poem was based on a song from a book called 'the Druid's Tune'. The full original verse is:

Twas on the plains I came upon her
A stranger sweet and daring-o
Her long dark hair fell all around her,
Her eyes as wild as the winds that blow.
Wrapped in rose and silver shining,
Shall I love this lady-o?
Or will she leave me sad and pining,
For a face as fair as the winter snow?
First I held her, and then I kissed her,
A fire as bright as the starry-o.

In all my life I never did meet,
Such a charming, playful lady-o.
Credit goes to Orla Mellings for writing the book, and all songs and
poems contained within it's wonderful pages.

Thanks,
Nat.

Disclaimer: As usual, I don't own Harry Potter.

Summary: See previous chapters.

Chapter Ten

Few would ever have believed it, but it was possible for a House Common Room to be absolutely silent, as proved by the Slytherins that night.

The cause, as it turned out, was Roisin Dursley-O'Conner. Fifteen minutes before the beginning of the canceled Quidditch Match, Mary had gone running to Professor Snape, the Slytherin Prefects, the Slytherin Second Years, and anyone else she could think of, babbling in absolute panic. Apparently, the Roisin's birthday gift, warning if she was in danger, had started blaring like a small siren. A prefect had promptly been sent with the hysterical girl, and reported back the new triple attack.

The result was mixed. On the good side, most of those who had been blaming Slytherin House for the attacks had backed off. Slytherin may not have been held in high regard, but no-one thought that they would Petrify one of their own.

The downside, of course, was that Roisin had been Petrified. Despite her non-magical parents and brother, not to mention two Gryffindor cousins, Roisin was very well liked in Slytherin, and even those who had been cheering the Heir on in his/her quest, thought that this was taking it a bit far.

House was family, and attacking family was never to be tolerated.

Mary and Seamus had immediately owled Fionna and their parents, with the result of the entire school being treated to the (loud) entrance of a livid Fionna O'Conner, who had marched straight up to the Head table and demanded a meeting with Dumbledore.

The Slytherins were all very impressed at how quickly the meeting was granted. The other houses were even jumpier than usual. Fionna could get scary when angered.

Mary and Seamus, it turned out, were just as scary when provoked. A Hufflepuff had suggested that Roisin had Petrified herself, to throw people of her and Harry's scent. No one was quite sure of the exact details, only that it involved the best the Weasley Twins had to purloin, and the finesse of the finest minds in Slytherin. Either way, it hadn't been pretty.

The Second-Years, however, were the most effected. Draco had put aside his rivalry long enough to exchange words with Harry, offering assistance if he found out who was behind the Petrifications. This had caused several eavesdroppers to look as though they had been Petrified, and one had walked straight into a wall, but Harry had only nodded, accepting the truce over a mutual friend.

Crabbe and Goyle were eating everything in sight, while Blaise had almost stopped eating, spending every spare moment in the Library with Theo and Millicent, trying to find out what had caused the Petrification.

Desdemona was un-naturally quiet, moping around at the loss of a best friend and, quite frankly, one of the few who would put up with her hyper ways without trying to hex her still within the first five minutes. Pansy frequently burst into tears and had given up taunting the other houses.

The truce between Gryffindor and Slytherin was not put to the test until several weeks after the latest attack, when Harry and Ron asked for assistance.

The school had been reeling from a double loss, although this time, the Heir of Slytherin had no direct hand in it. The Hogwarts Board of Governors had suspended Dumbledore for failing to stop the attacks, or discover the culprit behind them.

The rest of Hogwarts felt that this was rather counter-productive; as the last thing Hogwarts needed right now was the chaos that came with the change in leadership. The lesser loss but stronger shock was the news that Hagrid had been thrown in Azkaban and accused as the one behind the attacks. The Gryffindors were horrified. The

Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs were keeping their opinions close, but seemed mixed on the concept.

The Slytherins spent several hours in a shocked stupor. Hagrid, the Heir of Slytherin? It was nothing short of unthinkable. Everyone with any connection in the Ministry of Magic instantly sent off owls, demanding to know what was going on. The reply was a mixed relief and dismay. Hagrid's case was at worst pure speculation and at best circumstantial evidence. Sadly, Hagrid made a very good scapegoat and there was not a lot anyone could do about it unless the real heir was caught.

While Gryffindor and Slytherin were united in their staunch disbelief of Hagrid's guilt, they were firmly divided on the topic of Dumbledore. From a practical point of view, a shake-up and change of power was in no way a good thing at the current point in time. From a more personal stance, however, the Slytherins held grudges, and had little reason to love Dumbledore, and would welcome a head that wouldn't stand by as Slytherin was discriminated against.

Dumbledore aside, Ron, Harry and Seamus O'Conner joined the Second Year Slytherins trying to convince Madam Pomfrey to let them visit the Petrified victims. Sadly, not even this nearly unprecedented display of House Unity could move the stern Mediwitch, and visitors remained forbidden.

Draco, much to even his dismay, was stuck keeping up appearances, which mostly amounted to strutting around acting like he owned the school and pretending to be over the moon about the attacks. In the short term, Draco should not have been such a good actor, as even Pansy had to be forcibly restrained from hitting him.

Given the size of the blonde girl's crush on Draco, this was quite an accomplishment, almost eclipsing the fact that it had been Seamus Finnigan who had stopped her.

The next open show of alliance came after a particularly trying defense lesson, which had left everyone more than ready to introduce Lockhart to the concept of severe bodily harm.

It started when Lockhart practically bounced into the room, his expression clearly stating that they must be mad for looking so upset. "Come now, why all the long faces?"

The class exchanged resigned looks, united in exasperation. Theo wore a very bleak expression at Lockhart's cheerful outlook, deftly palming Desdemona's wand before she could throw any curses.

Meanwhile, Lockhart was still speaking in a tone most often used when speaking to a very dim five-year-old. "Don't you children realize the danger has passed? The culprit has been taken away!"

It was Neville Longbottom's turn to make a desperate grab for Millicent's wand, Dean Thomas covering the scuffle with a loud "Says who?"

"My dear young man, the Minister wouldn't have arrested Hagrid if he wasn't absolutely sure he was guilty."

Ron Weasley took up the challenge this time, drawing Lockhart away from where Crabbe had been about to lunge at him. "Oh, yes he would."

Lockhart's buoyant expression was slowly giving way to annoyance. "I flatter myself, Mr. Weasley, that I know a touch more about the Minister of Magic than you do."

Blaise was about to comment that Lockhart did nothing but flatter himself, rather than doing anything useful, but Lavender Brown kicked him under the table before he could say anything. Draco nearly said that Lockhart didn't know the first thing about tying his shoe laces, much less the inner workings of the Ministry, but found Pansy's hand covering his mouth.

The rest of the lesson was spent listening to Lockhart drop less than subtle hints about how he had known it all along, that Hagrid was the Heir of Slytherin, and how glad he was that the whole mess was now resolved. On the other hand, they were finally learning something useful in defense.

Honing the quick reflexes needed to stop each other from doing something drastic and painful counted as Defense, sort of.

After the lesson, the Slytherins were more than glad to hand a furious Desdemona over to Harry and Ron at the back of the line as Lockhart took them to dinner, as the two Gryffindors wanted to talk to her. Following the other Slytherins to the front of the line, Draco flexed an arm muscle strained from holding Desdemona back; it was times like this that he missed Roisin, and her ability to calm Desdemona without the use of a stunning charm, the most.

Back in the Gryffindor section, Harry was explaining things to Desdemona in a hushed voice. The hyperactive girl was shocked into a rare silence at the revelation that they had found a potential clue as to who was behind the attacks and very apprehensive that following it up meant a trip into the Forbidden Forest. Still, if it meant getting her hands on those responsible for attacking her best friend, then Desdemona was all for it.

That night found two Gryffindors and a Slytherin sneaking out of Hogwarts and into the Forbidden Forest.

Desdemona paid little attention to what the two boys were saying as they crept across the grounds; she had much more important things on her mind, such as the fact that Potter owned an Invisibility Cloak! Another important thing was the fact that while this certainly explained several things, Potter had also been sneaky enough to get a Witch's Oath not to tell anyone about his method of getting out unnoticed before revealing the Cloak to her.

Roisin had obviously been rubbing off on him, for Gryffindor's Golden Boy to come up with such a Slytherin way of ensuring her silence.

Desdemona's night quickly went downhill when they made a quick stop at the Grounds keeper's hut to hide the Cloak and collect a very large boar-hound. Desdemona hated dogs.

After that, things only got worse. Apparently, the rumors about a flying/enchanted car that Desdemona had scoffed at earlier in the year had been closer to the mark than anyone outside of Gryffindor had thought. On the positive side, Potter and Weasley were the only

ones to see the car in the forest, so there was no-one to gloat about Desdemona being wrong.

Not five minutes after running into the car, the three of them were caught by Acromantulas. If Desdemona made it out of the Forbidden Forest alive, she was going to murder those Gryffindor idiots, even if she had to resurrect them again first!

Spiders the size of carthorses dragged/carried them off to a dark hollow, surrounded with spider webs and with a huge webbed dome in the center. The three humans and one cowering dog were dumped on the ground and left to try and think up a last prayer as one of the spiders scurried over to the dome. It was hard to tell under all the clicking pincers, but it seemed like he was calling someone by the name of Aragog.

Desdemona nearly fainted at the reply. An aging spider the size of a small elephant crawled out of the dome. It's milky white eyes showed it was blind, but Desdemona found this less than comforting, considering that they were still surrounded by spiders who could see.

Desdemona shook herself out of her panic and focused on the situation at hand. Oh Gods. Hagrid knew these creatures? To the extent that they called him by name? What was going on here?

The temporary saving grace was that Potter could claim friendship with Hagrid, and that Aragog seemed to regard Hagrid as a friend, judging by the concern in his voice when Potter desperately shouted that Hagrid was in trouble.

Again, Desdemona firmly reminded herself that she was a Slytherin, and Slytherins did not show weakness. She was probably going to spend the rest of the night cowering under her blankets in the nice, safe dormitory, and would probably need therapy if she made it out of here alive, but for now she needed to pull herself together and concentrate. The whole reason for coming here was to find out about the Heir of Slytherin, and she would learn nothing if she surrendered to blind panic!

Giving herself a mental slap, Desdemona forced herself to focus. Harry was expanding on his claim that Hagrid was in trouble. "They think, up at the school, that Hagrid's been setting a- a- something on students. They've taken him to Azkaban."

That was probably not the best thing to say, as Aragog and the other Acromantulas were now furiously clicking their pincers in anger. "But that was years ago. Years and years ago. I remember it well. That is why they made him leave the school. They believed that I was what dwelled in what they called the Chamber of Secrets. They thought that Hagrid had opened the chamber and set me free."

Desdemona rolled her eyes as Harry asked if Aragog didn't come from the Chamber of Secrets. If Aragog was the monster of the chamber, but he was stuck out here in the Forbidden Forest, how would the Heir be carrying out his attacks now? Aragog confirmed this, although with less sarcasm. "I! I was not born in the castle. I came from a distant land. A traveler gave me to Hagrid when I was only an egg. Hagrid was only a boy, but he cared for me, hidden in a cupboard in the castle, feeding me on scraps from the table. Hagrid is my good friend, and a good man. When I was discovered, and blamed for the death of a girl, he protected me. I have lived here in the Forest ever since, where Hagrid still visits me. He even found me a wife, Mosag, and you see how our family has grown."

Yes, Desdemona could see how Aragog's children had grown, and really wished that she couldn't, as seeing the acromantulas involved being within eating distance of the carnivorous arachnids. Ron was hovering on the verge of catatonic with fear, but Harry managed to summon the last of the famed Gryffindor courage, to ask one more question. "So you didn't kill anybody?"

"Never!" The old spider's denial was fierce, and Desdemona decided that she must have imagined the faintest hint of a sulk in his tone. "It would have been my nature, but out of respect for Hagrid, I never harmed a human. The body of the girl who was killed was discovered in a bathroom. I never say any part of the castle but the cupboard where I grew up. Our kind like the dark and the quiet."

OK, now that that was settled, on to the real question. Desdemona listened as Harry continued in his role as spokesperson. "But then – Do you know what did kill the girl? Because whatever it is, it's back and it's attacking people again!"

Anything else Harry might have said was drowned by a sudden wave of angry clicking and rustling from the spiders. Aragog sounded angry as he fiercely rebutted Harry's question. "We do not speak of it! We do not name it! That thing that lives in the Chamber is an enemy that we spiders fear above all others! Well do I remember how I pleaded with Hagrid to let me go when I felt its presence. I did not tell even him what it was, although he asked me, many times!"

Aragog was backing into the dome again, and neither Harry nor Desdemona felt it wise to press the topic. Their escape was cut off, however, when Aragog pointed out that while no acromantula would harm Hagrid, that protection did not include anyone else who wandered in. As the spiders surrounded them, pressing closer, Desdemona drew her wand, thanking all of her lucky stars individually for the fact that the older Slytherins were still giving the younger years lessons in defense.

Demetra had claimed that spells depended greatly on the will of the caster, and the will to get back to Hogwarts alive was more than enough motivation, as far as Desdemona was concerned. "Stupefy!"

A beam of red light shot out of her wand and hit a spider, who dropped like a lead balloon. Beside her, Desdemona could see that Harry had his wand out, ready to fight, but it became un-necessary as Weasley's car made another appearance. It thundered down the slope into the hollow, horns blaring, lights blazing as the spiders either scattered or were sent flying. The car stopped in front of them, and the three students wasted no time in grabbing the dog and getting out of there.

Desdemona paid no attention as the car sped back through the forest and stopped near the Grounds keeper's hut. Opening the door, she staggered out and sat down heavily on a nearby tree stump. The boar hound had shot out of the car faster than lightning and, by the sound of it, was now whimpering under a blanket. Desdemona could certainly sympathize.

Harry had ducked inside to get the Invisibility Cloak, and Weasley was busy throwing up in the pumpkin patch. "Follow the spiders, he says." Weasley straightened up, wiping his mouth. "I'll never forgive Hagrid. We're lucky to be alive!"

Desdemona was sure that whole-hearted agreement with a Gryffindor was against some ethical or moral code, but she was forced to concur with Weasley. If Hagrid ever got out of Azkaban, she was going to kill him!

The rest of the Second Years had been waiting up for Desdemona, but managed to restrain themselves until the shaken girl had been settled in her bed with a mug of hot chocolate. She wasn't going to sleep that night anyway, so there was no harm in giving her caffeine. With Millicent sitting beside her reassuringly, Desdemona outlined the important parts of what had happened, inwardly fuming that Potter had demanded that Oath. The others were shocked and mildly horrified that there was a colony of Acromantulas in such close proximity to a school, but given Desdemona's current state, they chose to gloss over that as much as possible.

The bad news was that they still couldn't prove anything, and no authority figure, school or Ministry, was going to go and question a family of Acromantulas just because a twelve-year-old said so. The good news was that the conversation with Aragog had given them several new areas to search in regards to the culprit behind the attacks.

The Monster of Slytherin was long-lived, as Aragog mentioned that the previous attacks had been a good fifty years ago. There were several magical creatures who were potentially deadly, but few that an acromantula would flee from. The monster could kill, but so far the victims had only been Petrified. This narrowed the possibilities down a great deal, and the Slytherins would start work on it as soon as possible.

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A/N: Next chapter up and nearing the end of Year Two! I am so sorry I haven't updated before now. First I was overseas for almost three weeks with very limited computer access, and once I got back I had to go running all over the place to get ready for TAFE.

Anyway, chapter 22 is up now, and if you review I'll do my best not to take so long with chapter 23.

Thanks,

Nathalia

Disclaimer: As usual, I don't own Harry Potter.

Summary: See previous chapters.

Chapter Eleven

Still shaken over what had happened the previous night, Desdemona missed breakfast, but had cheered up by the time afternoon classes rolled around. Truce/Alliance or not, given the events of last night, a nice long hour or so of seeing Gryffindors suffer through Potions cheered her up immensely.

Desdemona's good mood, along with everyone else's, was spoiled later that evening, when Professor Snape came to the Slytherin Common Room at six fifteen for the dual purpose of making sure that everyone was obeying curfew, and to inform them that their exams would be starting on the first of June. Considering that the first of June was only nine days away, and that no one ever looked forward to exams, this news was not greeted with any particular enthusiasm.

Protests were quickly silenced by Professor Snape's cold look. "The point of keeping Hogwarts open, despite the attacks, is so that you can receive an education. Receiving an education includes reviewing your progress at the end of the year, meaning that you will be sitting for your exams. Despite recent events, I expect nothing less than excellence from all of you."

Given that a large part of the school year had been spent with the added strain of near-constant accusations regarding the Chamber of Secrets, and that they were being forced to rely on older students and independent study groups for one of their core subjects, excellence was going to be a very high goal for most of Slytherin.

Looking around at the dejected faces of his year mates, Theo sighed and began planning how many books he could get out of the library at one time. The next nine days were going to be spent in whirlwind of studying, he just knew it.

Theo's prediction of the days between the exam announcement and the exams themselves turned out to be an understatement.

Along with the general Atmosphere of Doom that always accompanied the time immediately before exams, the Second Years had even more trouble concentrating, as the year mate they counted on for obscure facts and references was currently in the Hospital Wing, a fact they were sharply reminded of whenever they turned to ask her something, and saw only an empty seat.

All of Slytherin spent every spare moment camped out in the library, which seemed to hold far more books now that Hermione Granger was unavailable to check them all out. When curfew rolled around at six o'clock, the Slytherins took as many books as they could back to the Common Room, and continued studying, frequently falling asleep over their tables, with a book for a pillow. They were also receiving extra, reinforced glares again, as the more study materials they commandeered, the less were available to the rest of the school. After the third day of this, angry mutters sprung up that the Slytherins were trying to make sure they got good grades by making sure that the rest of the school had no access to extra study materials.

The Slytherins pointed out the fact that it had originated with the more study-obsessed Ravenclaws, and was therefore an over-reaction, laughing the rumor off. Just because it was true didn't make it any less amusing.

After six days of near-constant studying amid quiet wails of doom and distress, the entire school had a dramatic lifting of spirits from an announcement at Breakfast on Friday. Around the middle of the meal, ensuring that everyone who would be attending breakfast was there, Professor McGonagall stood up, calling for people's attention. "I have good news."

Instead of falling silent, the Great Hall erupted in cheers, nearly everyone speculating to what the good news could be. Several people from Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff and Gryffindor shrieked with delight. "Dumbledore's coming back!"

Gryffindor Quidditch Captain Oliver Wood drew several rolled eyes from every House when he jumped to his feet. "Quidditch Matches are back on!"

The cheers intensified when a group of Ravenclaws squealed. "You've caught the Heir of Slytherin!"

It turned out to be none of the above, but still wonderful news. Professor McGonagall waited for the noise to die down before continuing her announcement. "Professor Sprout has informed me that the Mandrakes are ready for harvesting at last. Potions classes are cancelled for today," she paused again for more cheering, "While Professor Snape brews the Mandrake Draught, and those who have been Petrified should be awake by tonight. I hardly need to remind you that one of these poor people may be able to tell us who, or what, attacked them. I hope that this dreadful year will end with our capture of the culprit."

Professor McGonagall sat down to another bout of resounding cheers, and the students finished breakfast and set off to classes in higher spirits than they had been in for over a week.

The only thing that managed to put a damper on their day was the unfortunate fact that they had to put up with one last Defense lesson, and as Parvati pointed out in an exasperated sigh, Lockhart had somehow managed to reach new levels of annoying cheerfulness. Pansy had been heard to mutter that the unholy powers were going to need to invent a new level of Hell when someone finally killed Lockhart, but that was beside the point.

Aside from the usual grumbling at being forced to listen to Lockhart praise himself, interjected with frequent comments on how the danger had passed, with insinuations that he was to be credited, the lesson went as smoothly as could be expected. The only thing of real note happened when Lockhart was escorting them to History of Magic, still talking. "Mark my words; the first thing out of those poor Petrified people's mouths will be 'it was Hagrid'. Frankly, I'm astounded that Professor McGonagall still thinks that all these security measures were necessary."

Busy giggling over Draco's remark that Lockhart's main motivation for protesting the security measures was that it left less time for him to fuss over his personal appearance, the Slytherins nearly missed Potter agreeing with him. Millicent stumbled and knocked into Desdemona, who nearly crashed to the floor. Theo cursed when all

seven of Goyle's Defense books landed on his foot as the aforementioned boy dropped them in surprise.

Possibly surprised that someone was offering agreement, rather than a rude and/or sarcastic remark, Lockhart thanked him graciously and continued complaining. Another comment from Weasley had jaws dropping as Lockhart left them a few corridors away from the History of Magic classroom and hurried off. Looking around, Millicent spotted Potter and Weasley slipping away while everyone was distracted over Lockhart's desertion.

Luckily, it wasn't long before Professor Snape found them, returning from delivering a group of Hufflepuffs to their next class. A quick explanation drew a dark and faintly threatening look from Professor Snape, promising trouble for Lockhart, and no one noticed the absence of two Gryffindors as they were led to their next lesson, resigning themselves to another lesson of sheer boredom.

Just as they were leaving History of Magic for lunch, a dreadful announcement came. Professor McGonagall's voice echoed through the halls, commanding all students to return to their Common Rooms immediately. Knowing that Professor Snape would tell them everything, the Slytherins complied, trying not to dwell on the sinking feeling in everyone's stomachs.

It was even worse than they could have imagined. There had been a final attack, but this time the victim had been taken down into the Chamber of Secrets itself. This had been the straw that broke the Abraxan's back, and Hogwarts was being closed. The students would be taking the train home first thing tomorrow morning.

The Slytherins had packed their bags and most were wandering around the Common Room in a state of mild shock. Draco and Desdemona had gone to the owlery; Draco to send a letter to his parents, Desdemona because other Slytherins also wanted to inform their families, rather than let them find out via the morning paper, but figured that two students were less likely to be caught than a whole flock.

Pansy and Millicent were still in their Dorm, as were the O'Conner Twins, so it was Blaise who answered the frantic knocking on the Wall Entrance. Seeing Harry Potter in the Slytherin Dungeons was a

shock, but nothing compared to when Potter and Weasley explained that they were here to find Draco. Raising an eyebrow, Blaise informed them that Draco was unavailable, and could he help them with whatever it was?

It turned out that Weasley's sister had been taken to the Chamber of Secrets, and that the two Gryffindors thought they knew not only where to find the entrance to the Chamber, but also what the monster within was. In a surprising move for the House of Lions, they had the sense to realize that they could use back-up, and Draco had offered help on anything to do with stopping the attacks.

The shocks just seemed to keep on coming. Blaise had known that Draco had offered help, but there was no telling when Draco would be back. Blaise stepped out into the corridor, closing the wall behind him. "I'm not even going to ask how you found our Common Room. I don't know when Draco will be back, but Roisin is my friend too. I'm with you."

Potter nodded his acceptance. "Go grab your wand. We'll wait for you here."

Blaise ran up to his Dorm as fast as possible, nearly knocking over Pansy and Millicent as they made their way back down. He grabbed his wand, and then hesitated for a moment. Darting to his trunk, he grabbed Breaks with a Banshee and rifled through the pages. After the first Quidditch game, Blaise, Roisin and Desdemona had – confiscated – some photos from Colin Creevy. Among these were a number of photos of Lockhart covered in mud, and dyed a bright purple. It was unlikely that Lockhart would go down to the Chamber of Secrets willingly, however, and a little encouragement - say, these pictures on the front page of the Prophet, if he didn't co-operate - wouldn't hurt.

In hindsight, they really shouldn't have been surprised when they tracked down Lockhart and found him in a frenzy of packing. Potter's voice was surprisingly cold as he asked if Lockhart was going somewhere. Lockhart looked very uncomfortable. "Er, well, yes. Urgent call...unavoidable... got to go..."

Blaise rolled his eyes. Honestly, a child could see through that excuse, did Lockhart actually think that they would believe him? Weasley just looked angry. "What about my sister?"

It had been Weasley's sister who had been taken? No wonder he was so upset. Lockhart didn't seem to share Weasley's concern as he continued packing. "Well, as to that – most unfortunate. No one regrets more than I –"

This was taking things too far. No one in the school believed that Lockhart was in any way competent, but to not even show concern when they were supposed to be trying to help a student who was probably going to die if something was not done? It seemed that today was going to have many agreements between Gryffindor and Slytherin, as Potter and Weasley looked ready to kill something. "But you're the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher! You can't leave now, with all the Dark Arts stuff going on!"

As Blaise had expected, Lockhart just kept mumbling excuses, avoiding their eyes. "Well, I must say... when I took the job... never expected... nothing in the job description..."

Blaise had always been of the opinion that having the courage to charge in head first, playing the hero, was vastly over-rated, but this cowardliness was just insane! Potter looked frankly disbelieving. It was no secret that Potter harbored an extreme dislike of the Professor, but apparently even he had not thought him capable of this. "You mean you're running away? After all that stuff you did in your books?"

Again, Lockhart avoided their gaze, settling for a delicate, "Books can be misleading."

Potter's eyes flashed with anger. Blaise decided that he would really rather not be on Potter's bad side. "You wrote them!"

Blaise knew it. Weasley knew it. Hell, even the portraits knew why Potter was upset. Lockhart, however, seemed to think that Potter was just being petulant. "My dear boy, do use your common sense! My books wouldn't have sold half as well if people didn't think I'd done

those things! No one wants to read about some ugly old Armenian warlock, even if he did save a village from were-wolves. He'd look terrible on the front cover, absolutely no dress sense at all. And the witch who banished the banshee had a hair lip! I mean, come on..."

Blaise couldn't wait to see how the other Slytherins reacted to all this when Roisin woke up so he could tell her. There would be sarcastic remarks, gloating and who knew what else. Blaise started paying more attention, trying to remember every last detail. Potter was looking incredulous. "So you've just been taking credit for what a lot of other people have done?"

How Lockhart managed to pull off an expression of righteous indignation, Blaise would never know. "Harry, Harry, it's not nearly as simple as all that. There was work involved. I had to track people down, ask them exactly how they did it. Then I had to make them forget ever doing it. Luckily, I've always had a gift for Memory Charms..."

Lockhart banged the lid of his trunks down and locked them, before turning back to the three boys, wand in hand. "I think that's everything. Just one thing left. Sorry boys, but I have to Memory Charm you now. Can't have you blabbing my secrets all over the place, I'd never sell another book..."

Lockhart's posturing and flourishing movements would be his downfall one day, Blaise knew. Potter yelled the Disarming Charm before Lockhart could get off any spells and Blaise banished it toward Weasley, who threw it out the window.

OK, this was getting ridiculous. Potter and Weasley promptly steamrolled (whatever Roisin meant by that) over the rest of Lockhart's arguments, and the three students marched him off, ignoring any further protests.

Moaning Myrtle's bathroom was two floors, three moving staircases and a vanishing step away from the Defense Against the Dark Arts office. It was a nerve-racking journey, especially as they had to keep an eye on Lockhart and pay constant attention to their surroundings to avoid notice.

Lockhart started protesting again when they reached the bathroom, citing that it would be completely unprofessional for him to enter a female bathroom. Potter and Weasley seemed of the opinion that Lockhart's protests didn't even deserve the dignity of a response. Blaise told him to shut up and threw in Professor Snape's patented Glare. Lockhart stopped protesting.

That was one obstacle down, and now they faced the next: Moaning Myrtle herself. The ghost scowled upon seeing them, but her usual commotion was forestalled by Potter asking her how she died. Blaise failed to see how such a question could be taken as a compliment, but Moaning Myrtle acted as though she had just been complimented by the Queen. "Oh, it was dreadful. I died right here in this very bathroom. I was hiding, you see, because Olive Hornby had been teasing me about my glasses. The door was locked and I was crying, and then I heard someone come in. They said something funny, I think it was in a different language, but what really caught my attention was that it was a boy talking. Can you imagine, a boy in a girl's bathroom?"

Myrtle drifted off for a few moments. Lockhart jumped at the opportunity. "Like the lady says, boys in a girl's bathroom. Ha. Let's just leave, shall we."

Potter and Weasley ignored him and focused on Moaning Myrtle. Blaise shot a locking spell at the door and kept his wand trained on the Defense Professor, trying very hard not to curse the idiot. Just a little slip of the wand...

Lockhart was saved by Moaning Myrtle getting back on topic, glowing more than usual with so much attention being paid to her. "So I unlocked the door, to tell him to go and use his own bathroom, and then... I died!"

Good for her, but not really confirmation of what they needed to know. Thankfully, Potter was a little more diplomatic in his approach of the situation, and forewent the sarcasm. "How?"

Moaning Myrtle lowered her voice dramatically. "I don't know. I just remember seeing a pair of great yellow eyes. My body seized up, and

then I was floating away... But then I came back. I was determined to haunt Olive Hornby, after all. Oh, she was sorry she ever laughed at my glasses.”

A mindset that Blaise could certainly appreciate, but still beside the point. Years of association with Desdemona stopped him from trying to strangle the ghost. “Where did you see the eyes?”

Moaning Myrtle waved a hand toward the sinks. “Somewhere over there.”

Blaise closed his eyes and slowly counted to ten. Meanwhile, Potter and Weasley had hurried over to the sinks and were examining them in minute detail. Blaise approached the sinks just in time to hear Potter hiss something in Parseltongue. Whatever he said must have worked, as the sink slid away to reveal a man-sized hole in the ground, leading down into blackness.

Determination aside, Blaise felt slightly queasy at the idea of going down there. Weasley looked slightly faint. To his credit, Potter showed nothing but steely resolve. “I’m going down there.”

Weasley nodded. “Me too.”

Blaise inclined his head. “Can’t say I’m thrilled, but I’ve come this far already.”

In hindsight, Lockhart would have done better to just slip away quietly, as they had almost forgotten that he was even there. “Well, you don’t seem to need me any more, so why don’t I just...”

He trailed off unhappily as he once again became the focus of three wands. “You can go first.”

Lockhart slowly approached the hole, looking as though he would rather be anywhere else. Blaise was inclined to agree, but not so much that he was willing to send someone else down first. Potter pushed him in with a distinct lack of sympathy for Lockhart’s distress. Potter was next, and Blaise followed him, leaving Weasley to bring up the rear.

The pipe was cold and slimy, lined with something squishy that Blaise would rather not think about. It didn't take long before Blaise knew that they were well below the dungeons. He grimaced as a sharp bend sent his elbow, hard, against the wall of the pipe. Just as he was beginning to worry about ever getting out of the pipe, it leveled off and he stumbled out, moving aside just in time to avoid getting hit by a flying Weasley.

The tunnel they had landed in was just as damp and slimy as the pipe, but at least they had room to avoid the worst of it. The three students lit their wands, and instantly wished that they hadn't. The first steps yielded a loud crunch, and a closer look at the floor showed thousands of tiny skeletons. Trying very hard not to imagine his own potential fate, Blaise took a deep breath and continued walking, staying close to the others.

Hopefully they could just grab the Weasley girl and get out of this place.

hp

hp

hp

hp

A/N: I looked up the dates for 1992 and 1993, and the 1st of June was on a Monday and Tuesday respectively. As the Second Years had classes the day before, we can set the exam announcement as being at least Tuesday, making it six days before exams. I decided to be nice and pretend that the announcement came on a Friday, giving them nine days, rather than a week.

Anyway, yet another chapter up, and only about one more to go before we finish the year. Reviews provide direction and encouragement, so leave one to tell me what you think.

Thanks,
Nathalia

Chapter Twelve

Blaise was sincerely regretting his decision to follow Potter and Weasley to the Chamber of Secrets. Again. Actually, this was the nineteenth time he had mentally regretted coming along.

The tiny skeletons were becoming more and more frequent, the dripping walls were severely straining his nerves, being covered with slime and muck was not fun, and if Lockhart didn't stop whimpering, Blaise was not going to be responsible for his actions. They rounded yet another bend, and Blaise was contemplating the wisdom of hexing Lockhart now, or waiting so that the other Slytherins could join in when he heard Weasley say, "Harry, there's something up there..."

Draco disliked agreeing with Gryffindors on principle. Most Slytherins disliked agreeing with Gryffindors due to House Rivalries. Blaise wasn't quite that bad, but in this case, hated agreeing with Weasley even more than usual. It was hard to make out, but there was definitely a very large something ahead of them, lying across the tunnel. Blaise brought his regret counter up to an even twenty as Potter cringed. "Maybe it's asleep?"

Very slowly, the three boys edged forward, wands held high. Potter and Weasley had theirs lit, trying to get a look without waking the Basilisk. Blaise had his wand in a dueling grasp, ready to fire of a blinding hex if it did wake up. A few feet away from the Basilisk, they all breathed a sigh of relief, relaxing.

It was only a snakeskin. A vivid, poisonous green snakeskin at least twenty feet long, yes, but not a living, breathing Basilisk. Blaise made a mental note to get Roisin to convince Harry to teach her the Parseltongue word for 'Open'. If they got out of here alive, some Basilisk skin dueling robes would be wonderful, and there was easily enough skin for several pairs. Maybe Roisin would appreciate a set, in case Potter managed to drag her into any more of his insane adventures...

Blaise decided that he would ponder that later, and pay attention to the here and now. Lockhart had just tackled Weasley, and was straightening up, wand in hand. Having seen Weasley's broken wand

in action, Blaise wondered just what Lockhart thought he was going to accomplish with it. Unfortunately, Lockhart seemed to be beyond reasoning. “The adventure ends here, boys! I shall take a bit of this skin up to the school; tell them that I was too late to save the girl, and that you three tragically lost your minds at the sight of her mangled body. Say goodbye to your memories! Obliviate!”

Blaise threw himself backwards as the wand exploded like Longbottom’s cauldron in Potions class, rolling with the impact. The blast had thrown everyone backwards, and the ceiling was starting to crumble. Scrambling to his feet, Blaise cast the strongest Full-Body Shield charm he knew and ran, trying to avoid the larger rocks. Finally out of immediate danger, Blaise looked around, seeing Potter beside him and a solid wall of broken rock behind them, cutting off their exit. “Damn.”

Potter was a bit more articulate. “Ron! Are you OK, Ron?”

Weasley’s voice was muffled, but he didn’t seem to be hurt. “I’m here! I’m OK. This git’s not, though, he got blasted by the wand.”

There was a thudding noise and an older voice yelping ‘ow!’ It sounded like Lockhart had just been kicked, probably on the shin. Weasley’s voice sounded slightly desperate now. “What should we do? We can’t get through, it’ll take ages...”

Potter looked up at the cracked ceiling, down in the general direction of Weasley’s voice, then down the tunnel. “Wait there. Wait with Lockhart. I’ll go on. If I’m not back in an hour...”

There was a long pause before Weasley’s voice answered again. “I’ll try and shift some of this rock. So you can – so you can get back through. And, Harry...”

Potter cut him off. “See you in a bit.” He turned to look at Blaise. “I need you to stay and help them. If I don’t come back, you all need to get out of here.”

It looked like Blaise was going to be forced to admit a grudging respect for Potter. “Right. We’ll have it cleared by the time you get

back. Be careful down there, because if you don't come back, we're coming after you. Just in case, what's the Parseltongue word for open?"

Potter blinked in surprise, and then gave a low hiss. "Not to sound ungrateful, but why would you care what happens to me?"

Blaise repeated the hiss several times, until Potter nodded that he had it right, and then shrugged. "Because you are probably the best hope we have of fixing this bloody fiasco. Because Roisin likes you and I care about her and she gets upset and worried when you get nearly killed. Because she'd rip me apart if she discovered that I didn't help. Take your pick."

Potter gave a faint smile, and then turned to walk down the tunnel, while Blaise went back to the problem of shifting the rocks. His mental review of possible spells was interrupted by a quiet snicker from the other side. Blaise rolled his eyes at Weasley's amused tone. "O'Conner would rip you apart? You're scared of a twelve year old girl?"

Knowing that Weasley couldn't see him, Blaise refrained from glaring. "Thirteen, actually, and were you there when she hexed Lockhart for removing Potter's bones? Slytherin girls are never to be trifled with, in case you've forgotten the Dueling Club Disaster."

A faint pause from the other side. "Point taken. How do you want to move all this rock, anyway? I don't think we should risk any more spells, given the state of the ceiling."

Unfortunately, he had a point. "Agreed, it looks like manual labor is our best bet, but we need to be careful. How about one of us digs for five minutes or so, then we switch. You can get Lockhart to help, too. About time the moron did something useful for a change."

Another slight pause, then an affirmative reply. "We'll start. I'll give you a call when it's your turn. Right, you lazy git, get up and help me here."

The last bit was obviously to Lockhart. Now all Blaise needed was something to occupy him for five or ten minutes. Glancing around, Blaise spotted the Basilisk skin and pulled out the dagger that he, like many other Slytherins, had taken to carrying around since the attack on Roisin. A joint gift from his brothers, one a Ward-Crafter and Breaker, one who researched Magical Beasts, it was silver, magically crafted and charmed to cut through anything, including dragon-scale. Hopefully it would be enough to harvest Basilisk skin.

Mentally shrugging to himself, Blaise decided that it couldn't hurt to find out, and set to work. At least it was something to do until Weasley called for him to take his turn digging.

Blaise had alternated digging with Weasley and Lockhart, waiting as time inched past. They had made a sizable gap in the rock, enough for at least a teenager to get through, although a full grown adult might have had some trouble, when Potter and the female Weasley came into view.

Both were soaked and covered in muck, looking completely exhausted. Potter was also sporting both a fair bit of blood and a gleaming sword with a ruby-encrusted hilt. Blaise decided to ask about that later, as for the second time in as many hours, Blaise was nearly bowled over by Weasley, this time running toward his sister. "Ginny! You're alive, I don't believe it! What happened?"

Whatever had happened, it couldn't have been good, as the Weasley girl held her brother off, sobbing. Even so, Weasley didn't stop grinning with relief. "But you're OK now, Ginny. It's over now, it's – Where did that bird come from?"

It said a lot about Weasley's concern for his sister that it took him this long to notice the glorious phoenix riding on Potter's shoulder. Blaise rolled his eyes, recognising it from Roisin's description of Dumbledore's office when she had been escorted there after Heir of Slytherin accusations. "It's a Phoenix, you daft Gryffindor. Probably Dumbledore's, though that still begs the question of what the bird is doing down here."

Potter looked startled. “How did you – never mind. Yes, he’s Dumbledore’s. His name is Fawkes.”

Weasley shook his head, gaping at the weapon in Potter’s hand. “And how come you’ve got a sword?”

Potter just shook his head. “I’ll explain when we get out of here.” Weasley started to protest. Potter shook his head again. “Later. Where’s Lockhart?”

Weasley smirked, indicating over his shoulder. “Back over there. He’s in a bad way, though. Come and see.”

Blaise’s interaction with Lockhart since before the cave-in had consisted of accidentally-on-purpose jabbing his hand with a sharp piece of rock when they first broke through. Making sure that the Basilisk skin he had collected was safely in his robes, Blaise followed Potter and the Weasley girl through the hole, eager to see precisely what had happened to Lockhart.

Led by Fawkes, they made their way back to the pipe, where Lockhart was sitting, humming a placid tune and gazing around dreamily. Blaise couldn’t help but laugh at the irony; Lockhart had been blasted with his own Memory Charm! Lockhart peered up at them from where he was sitting. “Hello, there. Odd little place, this is. Do you live here?”

Blaise thought he saw a tiny smirk on the Weasley girl’s face at these words, followed by her brother’s exasperated negative reply. Potter, meanwhile, was looking up the dark pipe. “Have you given any thought on how we are supposed to get back up there?”

Blaise and Weasley both shook their heads, although in hindsight, it probably was something they should have thought about. Fawkes the Phoenix swooped over Weasley’s head, hovering in front of Potter, almost as though he were looking into Potter’s eyes and dangling his tail-feathers in front of the boy. Weasley blinked. “He looks like he wants you to grab hold. But you’re way too heavy for a bird to lift –“

A relieved smile slid over Potter's face. "Fawkes isn't an ordinary bird." He looked around at the small party. "We're going to have to hang onto each other. Ginny, take Ron's hand. Professor Lockhart – "

Lockhart was still staring off into space. Weasley poked him sharply. "He means you."

Potter continued, "You take Ginny's other hand. Zabini, grab Lockhart."

Blaise wore a faintly martyred expression as he disdainfully grasped Lockhart's upper arm. The Weasley girl bridged the gap between Lockhart and her brother, who held onto Potter's robes, who held tight to the phoenix's tail feathers. Slowly, they rose up, and then the air was whipping past their heads as they soared up the pipe and tumbled to the floor in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. The ghost looked surprised to see them. "You're alive."

Potter wiped a bit of slime off his glasses. "There's no need to sound so disappointed."

Looking around the bathroom, Blaise caught sight of himself in a mirror. He looked even filthier than Potter, which was saying a lot. Giving his robes up for lost; Blaise pulled them over his head and tossed them down the pipe, then walked over to the sink and stuck his head under the running water. It wasn't much better, but at least he no longer looked like something that had just crawled out of the sewer.

They left the bathroom and followed Fawkes to Professor McGonagall's office. Blaise winced; did it have to be McGonagall? Maybe he should have followed Potter and just let the Basilisk kill him. It probably would have been less painful than what he was likely to face now. Potter and Weasley didn't look overly keen to face the music, either, but knocked and pulled the door open.

There was dead silence for several moments, suddenly broken by a piercing scream of "Ginny!"

Narrowly avoiding being flattened by Weasleys was obviously becoming a habit, as Blaise darted out of the way of a woman who could only be the Weasley Matriarch as she ran to embrace her daughter, closely followed by her husband. Moving a safe distance away, Blaise looked around the room and mentally swore. Not only was McGonagall standing next to the fireplace, clutching her chest and gasping, but Professor Dumbledore was there also, complete with infuriating twinkle.

Blaise had no time to worry about this, however, and could only let out an undignified 'glurk' sound as Mrs. Weasley managed to include him in her frantic embrace. "You saved her. You saved her! How did you do it?"

Managing to wriggle out of the woman's grasp, Blaise tried to get his breath back as Professor McGonagall weakly added her two knuts. "I think we'd all like to know that."

Weasley and Potter also managed to escape Mrs. Weasley, and Potter walked over to the Headmaster's desk, setting down the remains of a diary, the Sorting Hat (how did that get into the Chamber?) and the sword, then starting the basic version of what had happened.

He spent a quarter of an hour explaining how he had heard the voice in the walls, how Granger had figured out it was a Basilisk, how he, Weasley and Desdemona had followed spiders into the forbidden forest and an Acromantula had confirmed where the last victim had died and how they had located the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets with Moaning Myrtle's help.

Thankfully, Potter didn't go into detail about Blaise's participation, only stating that he had helped them. Truce aside, Blaise didn't want people thinking that he would be making a habit of helping Gryffindors, and there was no certainty that ex-Gryffindors wouldn't take 'help in a life-threatening situation' to mean that the Slytherin in question had 'Joined the Light Side'. Idiots.

Professor McGonagall prompted him on when Potter finally stopped for breath. "Very well, so you found out where the Chamber of

Secrets was – breaking about a hundred school rules into pieces along the way – but how on earth did you all get out of there alive, Potter?”

Blaise was interested in that too, and listened closely as Potter described the timely arrival of Dumbledore’s phoenix, and how he had pulled the sword out of the Sorting Hat. When he reached explaining about the diary, however, he paused, obviously concerned about the effect it would have on the Weasley girl.

Luckily for both Gryffindors, Dumbledore somehow knew something about what had happened, and chose to intervene. “What baffles me, is how Lord Voldemort managed to enchant Miss Weasley, when my sources tell me he is currently hiding in the forests of Albainia.”

WHAT? Merlin, Morgana and the Ancients! How in the nine bloody Hells did this happen? Ginny’s parents were equally shocked at this new revelation. “W-what? You-Know-Who? En-enchanted Ginny? But Ginny isn’t – she hasn’t been – has she?”

This explained the diary, which had apparently belonged to, and been enchanted by, the Dark Lord. When the Baby Weasley had found the diary and written in it, the Dark Lord had used it to possess her and use her to unleash the Basilisk. According to her parents, Ginny should have known better, although Blaise didn’t see how. Dumbledore interrupted again at this point, suggesting that Ginny would benefit from a mug of hot chocolate and some bed rest in the Hospital Wing, where the Petrified Victims were currently waking up.

Roisin was awake! Blaise didn’t see the point of sticking around to be punished for breaking rules, and slipped out of the office with the Weasleys, making straight for the Slytherin Common Room to spread the good news and form a rescue party. After over a month in the Hospital Wing, Roisin was less than likely to want to stay for another week, which was Madam Pomfrey’s idea of ‘Bed (Ar)rest’.

It took several minutes to get down to the Slytherin Common Room, even with shortcuts and secret passageways, then another fourteen to organize the rescue party. A Prefect took the long way round to inform Professor Snape of Roisin’s relocation, and Mary and Seamus

created a distraction, bouncing around the Hospital Wing as the Second Years snuck Roisin out.

Roisin's body had relaxed, and she was just fully waking as they made it back to the Common room. The Second Years had just made it to the Girls Dorms when Roisin blinked several times and sat up. "Why am I still wearing a hospital gown? Can someone please get me a change of clothes?"

Anxious faces relaxed at her words, and the Second Year girls surrounded Roisin in a hug (the boys held back, as hugging was a girly thing, but looked intensely relieved at her recovery) and the Dorm Room erupted in a loud cheer that very nearly shook the walls, thankfully muffled by a silencing charm. Seconds later, the door opened to reveal Mary and Seamus, who had just managed to escape Madam Pomfrey's lecturing about disrupting her work. Hopefully, the nurse would be too busy seeing to her other patients to notice Roisin's absence. Seeing Roisin awake, they shot across the room and into her arms, refusing to let go.

Roisin remembered what had happened up to being petrified, but insisted on hearing what had happened between then and her revival. In bits and pieces, the Second Years explained what had happened while she had been petrified, occasionally interrupting each other for corrections or details.

Roisin looked slightly surprised at the mention of the Slytherin-Gryffindor Truce and openly stunned upon hearing that Desdemona had gone into the Forbidden Forest and faced a colony of Acromantulas. She turned very white and swayed slightly when she heard that Blaise had accompanied Harry and Ron into the Chamber of Secrets, but managed not to faint (unlike Pansy, who gracefully swooned over a startled Draco), smiling and kissing him on the cheek. Surprisingly enough, the House Cup was a draw, for the second year in a row. Gryffindor had been leading by twenty points before then, but wound up tied.

Dumbledore had given Harry and Ron two hundred points each, which normally would have secured them the cup, had Fate not intervened.

Well, not Fate, exactly, but close enough. Word seemed to travel as fast in the Staff Room as it did in the rest of the school, and the other Professors remembered that three students had gone into the Chamber, and reacted accordingly. Professor McGonagall had subtracted fifty points from each student for recklessly endangering their lives. Professor Sprout had awarded each of them thirty points for putting aside the notorious rivalry and working together for a Common Goal. Professor Flitwick awarded thirty points to Slytherin for use of a shielding charm (The Slytherins suspected it was more for getting rid of Lockhart, but the tiny professor needed a good excuse, and they weren't complaining.)

Professor Snape had removed a further fifty points each from Gryffindor for 'not having the sense to go to a proper professor who could be counted upon to actually know what they were doing' and awarded the two hundred points that Dumbledore had 'forgotten' to give. He then went on to give the other Second Years ten points each for 'uniting and overcoming barriers to help a fellow student' and Roisin fifteen points for 'escaping the harpy in the Hospital Wing' and a quick recovery.

Madam Pomfrey later subtracted five points from Slytherin when she tracked Roisin down and forcibly escorted her back to the Hospital Wing the day after the Petrified students had been woken and Roisin had escaped, but that was beside the point.

Exams had been canceled, with the exception of those taking OWLs and NEWTs, who just wanted the 'Hellish Ordeal' over and done with.

The other students were overjoyed, with one or two exceptions. While most of the school had been cheering at the announcement, Gryffindor Table had earned more than a few strange looks due to Hermione Granger's loud wail of "Oh, no!"

There was an even louder cheer, the students actually joined by several teachers, at the announcement that due to Memory Loss, Lockhart would not be returning the next year. The Slytherins gloated

even more when Blaise submitted a Pensive Memory of Lockhart's confession and attempted Obliviation and sent it to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Lockhart may be stuck in the Mental Ward of St. Mungo's, but this would make things very difficult if he ever recovered.

The last two weeks of the School Year passed in a haze of glorious sunshine. Defense Against the Dark Arts lessons were cancelled, although this made little difference, as Lockhart hadn't taught them much anyway. The Second Years received confirmation of their electives for Third Year, and the homework and preliminary reading for over the Summer.

Roisin was less than thrilled when she was called to Professor McGonagall's office and informed of all the extra-credit assignments she would have to complete if she wanted to pass Second Year. The catch up work very nearly decimated her free time, and promised a lot of extra work over the holidays.

All too soon, trunks were packed and they were back on the train to London. Most of the time was spent playing games or reading, but Blaise seemed unusually pensive. Finally, Roisin put down her charms book and the introduction of her extra-credit essay and looked at him. "OK Blaise, you haven't said a word since we left the station. What has you so thoughtful?"

Blaise shrugged. "Just an idea that's been bouncing around in my head for a while. Pets, especially magical ones, are usually named for some characteristic or theme. How did Dumbledore's Phoenix end up with a name like Fawkes?"

Roisin blinked. "I wondered about that too, for a bit. But it's obvious if you think about it."

Blaise raised an eyebrow at her. "Oh? Care to enlighten the rest of us clueless ones?"

She rolled her eyes. " 'Remember, remember, the 5th of November'. Phoenixs are born, age, die their own flames and are reborn from the ashes. Guy Fawkes night involves burning an effigy, a recreation, of

Guy Fawkes, and is repeated every year. Burned to death and created again the next year, only to burn once more. A phoenix is the symbol of life after death, and Fawkes was immortalized, annually brought back to life centuries after his death.”

There was a long pause, finally broken by Millicent. “Oh. I suppose that makes sense. Still a pretty silly name; the symbol of light called after a infamous terrorist.”

Theo shrugged. “No one ever claimed that Dumbledore had valid reasons behind half the things he does.”

Pansy huffed and looked out the window. “OK, boys out of the compartment. We’re nearly at Kings Cross, so we’d better get changed.”

Changed, baggage retrieved and a final check of the compartment, the Slytherins farewelled each other and struggled through the crowd to find their families. Locating Harry, Roisin made her way through the barrier to find her parents. “So, we both had near-death experiences and survived. How much do you want to bet that Mother and Father will be furious about us not dying?”

Harry grinned at her. “Never bet when you know you’re going to lose. Besides, I nearly died more than you did.”

Roisin laughed all the way to the car.

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A/N: End of Year Two! (Does happy dance.)

I don't know if Fawkes the phoenix is named after Guy Fawkes, but it seemed like an interesting idea, and I needed something to fill in the train ride. If this accidentally contradicts Canon, tell me and I'll change it.

Incidentally, anyone want to explain why I have over a hundred hits for Chapter Twenty Two and only two reviews? Feedback is very appreciated, and while I'm not going to threaten update with-holding, I really would like to know what people think. Use it as an opportunity to point out any mistakes.

Thanks, Nathalia

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter or the associated works. Deal with it.

Summary: See previous chapters

A/N: I AM A PUBLISHED WRITER!!! One of my original poems is published on the front page of a book titled 'Forever Spoken'! Available on Amazon . com online shopping! Can you tell I'm excited? If anyone is interested in the actual poem, tell me in a review, leave an address and I'll send it to you.

Chapter One

Roisin sighed and looked over her remaining homework. Due to the events of last term and her subsequent Petrification by a basilisk, Roisin now had a mountain of catch-up work to complete if she didn't want to repeat her second year. Roisin didn't want to repeat the year, and therefore resigned herself to the extra workload.

She had completed Charms, Potions, Astronomy and Herbology, but the remaining History of Magic, Transfiguration and Defense Against the Dark Arts, was going to take a while. When you factored in pre-reading for her electives Arithmancy, Care of Magical Creatures and Ancient Runes, it more or less ensured that most of her summer would be spent in schoolwork.

Sighing again, Roisin got started on her History of Magic Summer Essay. For once, it wasn't to do with Goblin Rebellions, but on the Witch Burnings.

It may have actually been easier to do Goblin Rebellions, as her History of Magic textbook had very little on the subject of Witch Burnings, despite its significance in Historical events. Oh, well. Roisin would just have to take what notes she could out of the textbook, then cross-reference and look up further information when she visited the O'Conner Keep in a few days.

Thinking of her ancestral home, Roisin smiled. O'Conner Keep was the home of the powerful O'Conner Clan, and the place where she spent most of her holidays away from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. A magnificent castle in Ireland, nearly as old as the green hills upon which it was built, the Keep and surrounding lands was definitely Roisin's favorite place to be.

The chime of the Hall Clock brought Roisin out of her wistful fantasy. Midnight. She had another hour to do her schoolwork before her twin or parents tried to check on her to ensure that she wasn't up to any of her 'freakishness'. Oh, well, back to the grindstone.

'The Witch Burnings, by Roisin O'Conner

The height of Witch Burnings and Trials occurred in Europe during the 11th to 17th centuries AD. The more publicized Witch Trials include the Spanish Inquisition, who needed a reason to keep their power after 'purging' the Templar Knights, and the Salem Witch Trials, a brief period of hysteria almost thirty years after European Witch Hunts had started to wane.

Muggles had many ways of 'testing' accused men and women, none of which were particularly effective. Admission by torture was unreliable, although accepted as truth, as the suspect would say anything the Inquisitors wanted them to, no matter how impossible.

Other methods were ineffective, but resulted in the deaths of countless innocent Muggles, because true witches and wizards could use simple charms to escape.

In 'Trial by Fire' the victim was bound to a stake and burned alive. If they burned, they were innocent; if they survived, they were found guilty and executed. In such cases, a witch or wizard would cast a simple flame-freezing charm and fake their agony and subsequent death, while enjoying a gentle tickling sensation. Indeed, several of the Magical Community viewed this as a perverse form of entertainment, deliberately allowing themselves to be 'caught' and burned.

Another method was 'Trial by Water', or 'Swimming'. The accused was bound and weighed down, before being thrown into a large body of water. If the accused floated, they were guilty. If the accused drowned, they were innocent. Witches and Wizards escaped death by using a Bubble-Head charm, then transfiguring an underwater object to look like a human, before freeing and Disillusioning

themselves and swimming away. While equally ineffective, this was not as widely enjoyed as a Burning.'

Covering another yawn, Roisin heard the fluttering of several wings outside, opening the curtain slightly and spotting a number of owls bearing letters and parcels flying to the window next to Roisin's. That window belonged to Roisin's cousin, Harry Potter, who had turned thirteen an hour ago, if the blinking 1:00 on Roisin's clock was correct.

Yet another owl branched off from the flock, headed toward Roisin's window. Noticing the heavy parchment, green ink and the design of the red wax seal, Roisin correctly assumed that it was the annual Hogwarts Letter. Opening the letter, she skimmed the contents. Dear Miss O'Conner, you are welcomed back for another year at Hogwarts...Train leaves September 1st... Enclosed list of books... Ooh! Hogsmeade permission form!

Hogsmeade was the all-wizarding village near Hogwarts, which students from Third Year and older were allowed to visit on alternate weekends. Having heard stories from the older years, Roisin was very glad that her Grandmother was considered her legal guardian in the Wizarding world. She didn't even want to think about the fuss Vernon and Petunia would put up as a prequel to bluntly refusing permission.

Idly, Roisin wondered how Harry was going to get permission to visit the village. If the Dursleys resented the fact that their daughter was a witch, they flat-out hated Harry for it. Harry was incredibly quick-witted and resourceful, but Roisin still wondered how he could convince her parents to sign the form, when they would probably refuse out of sheer spite.

Deciding to worry about it in the morning, Roisin went back to her essay, wanting to finish at least the first draft before going to bed. There was no point trying to finish an assignment when you were too tired to see straight.

Roisin slept in the next morning, and it was nine O'clock before she ventured down the stairs. Thankfully, her parents didn't expect her to do household chores since before her First Year, when they had tried

to lower her to 'Harry Status', which translated to somewhere between a House Elf and an indentured servant.

The idea had been dropped rather quickly upon the realization that Roisin wasn't nearly as nice as Harry, and had no qualms about testing her newfound magical knowledge on Dudley, who had started spewing up slime until they promised to leave her alone.

Entering the kitchen saw the house's other four residents eating breakfast and focusing on the newsreader, who was reporting a dangerous criminal by the name of Sirius Black. Listening to the report with half an ear, Roisin frowned. Sirius didn't sound like a Muggle name, and there was an ancient, if traditionally dark, pureblood family by the name of Black.

She would ask her grandmother or friends when she had the chance, at least one of them would know something about it. In fact, Roisin was sure Draco had mentioned something about a Sirius Black last year, when comparing bloodlines with the son of the new Ambassador to England from somewhere.

The other boys in their year had been viewing it as similar to a tennis match. Millicent had been listening for the sole purpose of making sardonic comments to Pansy and Desdemona. Roisin had tried to ignore them while finishing her Transfiguration homework.

Roisin's attention was drawn back to the present when Vernon turned off the TV and drained the last of his coffee. "I'd better be off in a minute, Petunia; Marge's train comes in at ten."

Roisin had been skimming her Charms book for the dual purpose of studying and seeing how long it would take for her family to notice and throw a fit. Upon hearing her father's statement, Roisin dropped the book in horror. Dudley was ignored when he saw the title, shrieked, and fell off his chair while Roisin and Harry exchanged horrified glances. Harry was the one to actually vocalize the thought. "Aunt Marge? She's not coming here, is she?"

The 'Marge' in question was Roisin's paternal aunt, and just as intolerant as her parents when it came to anything out of the ordinary. She lived in the country, where she bred bulldogs, and thankfully didn't visit them very often, a fact that Roisin was profoundly grateful for.

Though self-preservation meant that she wasn't about to vocalize it, Roisin agreed with Harry. Aunt Marge was even worse a Muggle than her own parents, and even Fionna had been heard to despair over how she had ever given birth to such a disappointment.

Of course, Fionna had also commented more than once that the entire Dursley family (with the exception of her late husband, the black sheep of the family, and Roisin, a flourishing witch) was depressingly normal, but everyone agreed that Vernon and Marge took it to a whole new level.

But if Roisin was her Grandmother's favorite, Dudley was the light of Aunt Marge's life, and was automatically invited to the station with Vernon. Petunia declined for him, however, insisting that 'her Duddy' had to make himself all handsome for his aunt. Thankfully, neither parent noticed Roisin's openly skeptical expression.

As soon as their mother's back was turned, Dudley winced; no doubt anticipating one of Aunt Marge's smothering hugs. Making sure that Petunia had left the room, Roisin leaned toward her twin. "Nah nah na-na nah."

Dudley glared at her. "How do you know she won't head straight for you?"

Roisin gave up the fight against malicious amusement. "Because I'll be standing conveniently out of the way, and because Aunt Marge thinks I'm eccentric, and you're the apple of her beady little eye."

Dudley's glare deepened. "Think you're so great, don't you? Why don't you prove it and suffer through her hugs."

Roisin returned the glare with a condescending look. "A child could see through that ploy. To answer: I am secure in my superiority."

Therefore, I find no need to prove it by humiliating myself. Especially for your benefit.”

Dudley finally lost the glare, his expression turning desperate. “Come on, Roisin. I’ll toss you for it?”

Roisin smirked. “Not likely.”

Dudley resorted to threats. “I’ll break that stupid stick of yours and burn your schoolwork.”

Roisin shot him a withering look. He’d have to find her wand, first. Besides, she had convinced Fionna to transfigure a stick into an exact replica of her wand in her first year, just in case. “You don’t know where my wand is, and I’m leaving tomorrow, so I can just re-do my homework at Nana’s.”

Dudley was obviously grasping at straws now. “I’ll tell everyone about you and that...school of yours.”

Roisin narrowed her eyes. Like anyone would believe him. “No.” Dudley opened his mouth, but she cut him off. “And if you keep bothering me, I have photographic evidence of you and ‘blankie’, which is far more effective than any allegations of witchcraft.”

Dudley glared and stormed off, the kitchen shaking with every stomp. Actually, Roisin didn’t have a scrap of evidence to prove anything, but Dudley didn’t know that. Sometimes bluffs worked even better than real blackmail, and there was no harm in using such methods, if it achieved the desired result.

Once Dudley had gone, Roisin ignored all her previous lessons on proper posture, and slumped in her chair. This was going to be an unmitigated disaster, no matter how you looked at it.

Well at least there was one bright side. Last year, Roisin’s parents had struck a deal with her grandmother and extended family. For the first half of the summer holidays, Roisin would stay with her parents at Number Four Privet Drive. This was long enough to keep up

appearances with the rest of the neighborhood and prevent any uncomfortable questions from outside sources.

Roisin spent the 1st and 2nd of August celebrating Lughnasadh in Ireland, came back for a week, again for the neighborhood's benefit, then went back to the O'Conner Keep until the start of the Hogwarts school year.

Finishing her breakfast, Roisin headed straight back upstairs to her room. Grabbing parchment and quill, she wrote out a quick letter to her Grandmother, warning her of Aunt Marge's visit. With any luck, it would reach O'Conner Keep in time to warn Fionna and whoever else was coming to pick her up. Aunt Marge was hard to deal with when you had adequate forewarning. When you weren't expecting her, it was simply trouble waiting to happen.

Roisin had finished her letter and sent it off with Hedwig, and had just returned to her Charms book when she heard a car pulling into the driveway, shortly followed by her aunt's loud voice. Listening closely, Roisin smirked, wondering how much Dudley would pay to make sure Aunt Marge's pet names for him ('Dudders' and 'neffy-poo') never became public knowledge.

The smirk left her face when she heard Aunt Marge calling for her 'little flower-bud'. Thanking every deity and lucky spirit individually and by name that none of her friends would hear about this, Roisin sighed and made her way downstairs. Best to greet Aunt Marge and get it over with.

Roisin made it downstairs just in time for Aunt Marge to release her brother from a second hug. For once, Dudley actually looked relieved to see her, even if Roisin did manage to escape her hug a lot faster than he had. Carefully situating herself behind her brother and therefore out of hugging-range, Roisin resisted the urge to kick Aunt Marge's favorite dog, Ripper, and steeled herself for at least an hour stuck in Aunt Marge's company.

Roisin had never been her Aunt's favorite twin, a fact for which she was greatly relieved. She was also relieved that her Aunt seldom cursed Privet Drive with her presence. Nevertheless, on the rare occasions that Aunt Marge did visit, Roisin always found herself

counting the hours until she left again, and relishing any excuse to get away.

Not to say that there wasn't the occasional upside to her Aunt's visits. Roisin had not missed the fact that her Aunt was not the most observant of people, and frequently used her as a test dummy to practice snide or sarcastic remarks and subtle insults. Another high point was birthdays and such, when Fionna was usually visiting at the same time. Such instances were always amusing.

The day after Aunt Marge's arrival was one such instance. Warned by Roisin's letter, Fionna and Roisin's 'Terrible Twin' cousins had portkeyed to a few blocks away and walked to Privet Drive. The expression on her Aunt, brother and parent's faces was a memory to treasure as Mary and Seamus ran toward her, yelling in delight.

Petunia, always worried about what the neighborhood thought of them, instantly looked out the window to see if anyone had taken notice of it. Vernon and Dudley both winced at Roisin's appearance, confirming Roisin's belief that Fionna had been forcefully persuasive in getting the rest of the Dursley family to agree to Roisin's new 'Summer Arrangement.'

Aunt Marge started, obviously having not been informed of Roisin's visit to her Grandmother. "Mother! I didn't know you were visiting, too."

A thin smile touched Fionna's lips. "I'm not. I am simply here to pick up Roisin for the Lughnasadh festival. Roisin, go fetch your bag. Mary, Seamus, behave yourselves and go help her. Don't worry, Marge, you'll see her again before your visit here is over."

Aunt Marge sneered at Fionna's explanation, obviously displeased at something. "You mean you are encouraging my little flower bud in those heathen practices? Really, Mother, it just isn't normal, what will her friends think? Vernon, you can't be thinking of allowing this!"

Fionna frowned at both of her children, who squirmed beneath her stern gaze. "Those 'heathen practices' are your heritage, Marge

Dursley, and Roisin's. Besides, it is a chance to get to know her other family, so I will hear no more protests."

Thankfully, Roisin chose this moment to make her re-appearance, bag in hand, saving the room from any further arguments. Taking her Grandmother's hand, she waved goodbye to the room at large. "See you in two days! Come on, Nana; tell me what everyone's been up too."

Lughnasadh was especially enjoyable that year. Roisin's admittedly much older friend, Sorcha, had decided that she and her hand fasted, Sean Muldoon, made a fairly good couple, and consented to marriage. This meant an extra celebration, the only downside of which was that it had Mary and Seamus bouncing off the walls, which in turn resulted in Roisin trying to avoid them.

Another surprise was that her oldest cousin, eighteen-year-old Aiden, had started formally courting another of Roisin's friends, Aoibhe, and had yet to hear the end of his younger siblings. The end result of this was that Roisin now had an accomplice in hiding, which made things a lot easier.

Lughnasadh passed all too quickly, and after the brief respite among extended, nurturing, family, Roisin was headed back to Privet Drive for four more days of Aunt Marge, and fourteen of her immediate family. Ugh.

Like all children and teenagers, Roisin loved getting presents. However, even she was forced to admit that Aunt Marge went a little overboard, even with the excuse that she saw Roisin and Dudley so little, that she loved to spoil them when she could. The fact was that while Roisin enjoyed presents, there were only so many things One could receive before running out of ideas for things they really wanted.

In contrast, Dudley had no such restraint, and delighted in the huge, expensive gifts Aunt Marge brought him, both boy and Aunt glaring at Harry, daring him to ask for something, as well.

The Dursleys of Privet Drive were taking Aunt Marge to some of the London attractions, followed by a trip to the theatre to see 'The Lion King Musical'. They chose a restaurant near a mall to have lunch,

after which Dudley insisted that he had seen something he 'really really wanted' in one of the shops. Naturally, Aunt Marge insisted that they find this item for her 'neffy-poo' and took the three teens off to look through the shops.

Fifteen minutes later, Roisin was ready to scream with boredom. Taking a chance while Aunt Marge was busy criticizing Harry, Roisin was careful to keep her voice down as she informed Dudley that if they weren't out of here within half an hour, he was going to be on the receiving end of the nastiest potion she could brew. Dudley paled, but before he could reply, Aunt Marge noticed his pale face and called him up to walk next to her. Smirking at his escape, Dudley complied, 'accidentally' nudging her into a wall as he did so.

Roisin's response to her brother's 'nudge' as he pushed past her was thankfully inaudible, hissed through clenched teeth. For some reason, it also prompted a hastily smothered laugh from Harry.

Rubbing her hip where Dudley had pushed her into the doorframe, Roisin shot her cousin a nasty look. "What is so terribly amusing, if I may ask?"

Harry made a valiant effort to control his amusement, and then hissed himself, changing notes slightly. "Try something more like that." He paused for a moment. "Unless you really do think Dudley should throw a lemming at a windmill?"

Roisin blinked and started to smile. "Is that what I hissed? What did you just say?"

Harry grinned. "Literally, 'Seek bitter-tasting water and sink like rock'. Essentially, 'go jump in a lake'. Snakes go more for description than names when they talk."

That was an interesting bit of information. "So in Parseltongue, what would my name be? On that thought, what is yours?"

Harry gave an almost musical hiss, followed by a pause and then a lower hiss. "You are 'Night-flower-with-storm-cloud-eyes', I'm 'Speaker-with-eyes-like-fresh-grass'. Given last year's events, I'm a bit surprised you aren't upset about me speaking Parseltongue."

Roisin shrugged. "I'm also a Slytherin, so I can appreciate the humor of a Gryffindor lion speaking Slytherin's trademark. Besides, Parseltongue definitely has its uses. If you didn't speak to snakes you never would have made it into the Chamber to stop the attacks. You should never be ashamed of your gifts, Harry, just because others disapprove."

Her cousin smiled. "Thanks, Roisin. It's nice to know someone won't flinch and go pale whenever I hiss at something."

The conversation was broken up when Aunt Marge stomped over. "Rosie-dear, what are you doing with that scrawny little monster? Go and pick something you want while I see what Duddy is up to. Precious little tyke."

Roisin waited until Aunt Marge was out of hearing range, and then repeated Harry's hissed suggestion from earlier. Harry burst out laughing.

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A/N: Sorry for the lack of updates, I have been beyond busy with TAFE, birthday plans, being newly published and a multitude of other things. Anyway, review and tell me what you think.

BTW, does anyone here like X-Men: Evolution? I'm working on a chaptered story in that fandom and would be interested in people's opinions.

Thanks,

Nat

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. Sigh

Summary: See previous chapters

Chapter Two

Harry's preferred mode of dealing with Aunt Marge was to ignore her and mentally recite a book on broomstick care. Roisin used her long practice with Draco on one of his rants to zone her out.

After the impromptu lesson on Parseltongue insults, Roisin had somehow talked Harry into teaching her the language, and practiced diligently. It was very tone-and-inflection based, with the slightest difference in key changing a word or sentence entirely, almost like learning to speak Japanese.

It was very difficult, but Roisin and Harry somehow managed to survive the next few days without maiming anyone. On the last day of Aunt Marge's visit, however, disaster struck.

Petunia had cooked a large, fancy dinner and several bottles of wine were opened. They managed to make it most of the way through dinner without much fuss, and only a few snide remarks about Harry's many perceived deficiencies, suffered through a long and boring monologue about Grunnings during the lemon meringue pie, and by after-dinner drinks, Roisin had actually started to hope that nothing would happen.

She was wrong. As often happens when one indulges a bit too much in spirits, Aunt Marge had stopped considering her words, not that she ever really did, and failed to notice the obvious signs of Harry's anger at the way she spoke of his parents, and the growing worry as the rest of the Dursley family could only pray that no-one lost control and blew something up.

Aunt Marge finally stopped insulting Aunt Lily, and moved onto her husband, calling him a 'lazy, good-for-nothing scrounger'. At this, Harry had quite obviously had enough, and somehow lost control of his magic.

Roisin watched in horror as her Aunt Marge slowly inflated. The sight, and everyone else's expressions, were almost fascinating, in a decidedly morbid sort of way.

She snapped out of her shock at the sound of Harry thundering down the stairs, dragging his trunk with him. "I've had enough here, Roisin. Someone from the Ministry will probably be coming along soon to fix her. Will you be all right alone here until then?"

Roisin knew that the question was well-meant, but that didn't stop her from leveling a glare at her cousin. "My family is in a state of hysteria, you're about to bolt out of the door, and Ministry Officials will be breaking down the door wanting to know what happened. I am not about to stick around to take the fall for all this if someone reacts badly. We can send Hedwig to Nana once we're out of here."

Roisin dodged past Harry and made a dash for her room to collect her own trunk. Set to leave for Ireland early in the morning the next day, Roisin's trunk was already packed, and with the Lightening Charm Nessa had placed on it last year, it was the work of a few moments to drag it downstairs to where Harry held her father at wand point.

With a moment of regret that she hadn't tried that, overruled by the belief of never making a threat you couldn't carry out, Roisin kicked open the front door and the two cousins made their escape into the night.

They made it to Magnolia Crescent, several streets away, before collapsing on a low wall. Roisin located a piece of parchment and a self-inking quill and wrote a brief letter to her grandmother, only to look around and find a distinct lack of owl. Apparently, Harry had let Hedwig out for a night time hunt just before dinner, and she had not returned before the escape from Privet Drive. Deciding not to voice her thoughts at that moment, Roisin sighed and put away the letter. "So, what do we do now?"

Harry shrugged. "The letter last summer said that I would be expelled if I did any more magic outside of school. I'm trying not to think of how long it will be before they find me and snap my wand."

Roisin gave him a flat look. "It's called 'Home-Schooling', Harry, and don't be daft. Any number of tutors world-wide would jump at the chance to tutor you, and since you didn't use a wand, you can always plead the defense of accidental magic, which does happen occasionally, even as an adult."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "You've put a lot of thought into this."

Roisin shrugged. "Slytherin Code of Conduct. 'If someone must be blamed, make sure it's not you.' 'For every rule, there is a loophole.' 'Hope for the best, plan for the worst, and always have a good escape route.' And if you ever tell anyone about this, I am legally obliged to hunt you down and kill you."

Harry somehow managed to raise the other eyebrow and blink at the same time. "I'll be worried about the last bit later. Slytherin actually has a code of conduct? I mean, those rules make sense, but I can't imagine any of the other houses doing something like that. But I would have thought there would be a few more snide remarks with those rules."

Roisin narrowed her eyes. "Of course there are. 'Slytherins are not responsible for the stupidity of other Houses' and 'When they say fortune favors the brave, they mean that Gryffindors only survive through sheer luck.'"

Harry looked faintly indignant but before he could reply, he frowned, scanning the surrounding area as if searching for something. Through ten years of living with the Dursleys, Harry had developed a very keen sense for danger and knowing if someone was watching him. Given the events of the last hour, Roisin was willing to trust that instinct. A soft 'lumos' lit the surrounding area, and showed the distinct presence of something large and hulking, with wide, gleaming eyes.

Harry stumbled backwards, tripping over his trunk. Roisin managed to catch him before he fell, but had to duck his flailing wand hand. Of course, she nearly fell over herself when there was a loud bang and a huge purple bus appeared out of nowhere. A young man, who

couldn't have been more than a few years out of Hogwarts, jumped off the bus. "Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard. Just stick out your wand hand and we'll take you wherever you need to go. My name is Stan Shunpike and I will be your conductor this evening."

Roisin muttered something rude in parseltongue and picked up her trunk. "We need to go to Diagon Alley in London. How much would that cost?"

Her less than happy tone shot right over the young man's head. "Eleven sickles, but for thirteen you get hot chocolate, and for fifteen you get a hot water-bottle and a toothbrush in the colour of your choice."

Roisin decided she could skip brushing her teeth this once, and with the way the Knight Bus showed up, she didn't think spill able drinks were such a good idea. Digging in her moneybag, Roisin handed over eleven sickles and climbed on board, leaving Stan to pick up the trunks.

There were no seats on the bus, but rather several beds beside curtained windows. Placing her trunk beside one of the front beds, Roisin was sharply reminded of why she hadn't ordered hot chocolate as the bus lurched forward, sending her sprawling onto the bed. Hissing a suggestion about the driver's immediate ancestry and a not-that-subtle hint about whether or not they had been legitimately wed, Roisin locked her feet around the bedposts, pulled the covers over her head and clung to the mattress, trying to fall asleep. Note to Self: find whoever owns the Knight Bus or its parent company, and insist that the staff take driving lessons!

By some miracle, Roisin did manage to fall asleep, so she wasn't sure how much time passed before she was gently shaken awake by Harry, telling her that they had arrived. Resolving to never complain about portkeys again, Roisin staggered off the bus, leaning against the wall as Stan Shunpike retrieved their trunks. Trying to re-gain her bearings, Roisin jumped as a voice announced, "There you are, Harry!"

Most of the Slytherins had some very amusing stories about Cornelius Fudge, and Aiden had done an internship at the Irish Ministry, who apparently didn't think much of him. Seeing the Minister face to face, Roisin was forced to agree. Fudge wore a pinstriped cloak and a lime-green bowler hat, and hardly cut an intimidating figure. Biting back a giggle, Roisin went to book a room as Harry and the Minister sorted something out with the Driver and Conductor, returning just in time to see Harry headed to a private parlor.

Roisin followed him in, trying not to fall back asleep where she stood. When Harry finished whatever he was doing, he should at least know where they were staying. Fudge frowned at her as she walked in. "Young lady, this is supposed to be a private..."

Harry cut him off. "It's fine, Minister Fudge. This is my cousin, Roisin O'Conner. She's here with me."

Draco had described Fudge as 'sucking up to anyone with power and Old Family connections'. As the man hastily back-tracked at the mention of her name, Roisin decided that he had probably been right. "I'm fine, Harry. Listen, we're staying in room twelve, and I'm just going up now. Try not to spend all night down here."

Softening the last remark with a smile, Roisin left the parlor and followed Tom up the stairs to a door with a brass number twelve on it. Thanking the innkeeper and opening the door, Roisin saw two single beds, some highly polished oak furniture, a cheerfully crackling fire, and a very familiar snowy owl perched on the wardrobe. Fishing the letter she had written earlier out of her trunk, Roisin gave it to Hedwig, with instructions to take it to the O'Conner Keep, then shut the window. It may have been summer, but the nights were still cold.

Changing into her nightclothes, Roisin chose the bed away from the window and climbed in, savoring the fact that this bed didn't fly all over the place for lack of skilled driving.

She managed to stay awake long enough to hear Harry come up and explain why Hedwig wasn't there, then fell asleep almost instantly.

It was good to be back in the Magical World, even if her grandmother was likely to throw a fit over running away with no plan of action and staying somewhere like the Leaky Cauldron. Oh well.

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A/N: I am so sorry for the lack of updates and the shortness of this chapter. My only excuses are writers block and a large dose of Real Life getting in the way. Anyway, you know the drill: Review and tell me what you think. Constructive criticism is welcomed, flames are laughed at, and if you have any questions I'll try to answer them if you log in or leave an email address.

The Slytherin Code of Conduct can be found at [http : / / www . greatest journal . com / users / keitorin / 1391.html](http://www.greatestjournal.com/users/keitorin/1391.html). Just remove the spaces.

Disclaimer: As usual, I'm getting sick of writing the same thing every chapter.

Summary: See above.

Chapter Three

Harry had already sent Hedwig off with a letter for someone by the time Roisin woke up, which meant that she wouldn't be able to contact her grandmother until the owl came back. Her cousin did have the grace to look sheepish when she pointed this out, but it didn't change the fact that they were now stuck in the Leaky Cauldron until Hedwig returned.

Roisin could be social when she wanted or needed to be, but when push came to shove, she had a very introversive personality. Add to this the constant noise and crowd of people going in and out of the Leaky Cauldron on their way to one of the Alleys or just for lunch/dinner/after-work-pint, and Roisin found herself in the unique position of looking forward to the school year.

Luckily, Roisin's friends had not forgotten her, and Desdemona had sent an owl suggesting a time to meet up in Diagon Alley. Roisin instantly wrote back, agreeing on two days from then, the 10th of August, at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor. This was Roisin and Harry's current Haunt for doing their homework, anyway, largely because it was the quietest part of the Alley (excluding the Bookstore) and because Florean himself knew a lot about the Witch Trials and gave Harry and Roisin a free sundae every time they came in. It had started out as every half hour, but since neither cousin wanted to be as fat as Dudley or sick from too much ice-cream, they had convinced him that one a day was plenty.

That Monday, Roisin was working on her last two essays, both Defense Against the Dark Arts, when she heard Desdemona's cheerful voice enter the parlor, accompanied by the lower tones of Millicent Bulstrode. Harry looked quickly between his cousin and the

approaching girls and quickly stood up. "I'll just go to Quality Quidditch Supplies and admire that firebolt again, shall I?"

Harry may have been too much of a Gryffindor for his own good on occasion, but he still had that instinctive sense of self preservation that makes boys flee in the face of girl talk. Roisin smiled at her cousin as she waved her housemates over. "You do that. I'll see you later. Hey, guys."

The other Slytherin girls noticed Roisin and came over. Running was beneath a Slytherin's dignity, but moving swiftly was acceptable. "Hi, Roisin. How was your Summer?"

Desdemona was Roisin's best friend, but she could be rather dense at times. "I underestimated just how much work I needed to catch up on. I've done most of it, but I still need to finish Defense Against the Dark Arts and have you seen Lockhart's idea of an acceptable essay topic? I haven't even started Transfiguration and I need to do my pre-elective reading! If I get any free time this summer, I'll be amazed."

Desdemona and Millicent watched their friend with no small amount of sympathy. Lockhart's last act as a Hogwarts Professor had been to set an extra credit essay for the students who had been petrified by the Basilisk. Suddenly, Desdemona did a double take at the assigned topic, and burst out laughing. Roisin, who had been trying to avoid looking at the assignment, now did so, and joined her friend in very vocal amusement.

Millicent gave them both a puzzled look. While Lockhart himself had been the subject of much laughter and mocking, the work he set was never anything short of a disaster. "What's so funny?"

Roisin managed to control herself long enough to point out the essay topic. "'Defeating a Vampire using one of Gilderoy Lockhart's favorite charms'. And look at the regular essay; 'Describe how to defeat an opponent using non-offensive spells'. What in the nine hells was that blond moron thinking?"

Millicent looked blank. "That still doesn't explain why you are laughing. They might be the stupidest topics ever, but we still have to do them."

Roisin's reply was an almost predatory smirk. "Do you think Lockhart ever used tanning charms? Vain as he was, I'm betting yes, but I doubt that Vampires tan nearly as well as humans."

A matching smile spread over Millicent's face as she grabbed for parchment and quill, hastily jotting down ideas for her own essay. "My first governess thought that every girl should know at least a few household charms. Chopping or grating charms, perhaps? I'd love to see the shape of my opponent after a well-cast rug-beating charm."

Desdemona's answering grin was nothing short of evil. "What about cosmetic charms? If you cast a hair removal charm, but left out the numbing or limiting parameters aspects..."

Roisin had to try very hard to stop herself from cackling like the Wicked Witch of the West. "Spells are all well and good, but not much use without creative use of them. Besides, there's really no substitute for a good imagination."

Desdemona giggled, regaining her faintly maniacal grin. "I wonder what our new Defense teacher will think of this. I'd love to be the one grading these essays."

Millicent made a derisive sound. "I wouldn't; can you imagine the kind of work the less imaginative students are going to turn in? Anyway, I doubt it will matter what the new Professor thinks. We're Slytherins, remember?"

Roisin sighed, silently acknowledging the point. "Maybe the Professor will be Slytherin Aluminum? Can we change the topic, please? I'm starting to feel depressed again."

Desdemona nodded in agreement. "Point taken. Have you heard from the others this summer?"

Roisin shook her head. "Only a little. Blaise got dragged to Italy again, and Draco, Pansy and Theo don't want to risk their parents catching them sending owls to a Muggle neighborhood. I heard once or twice

from Greg and Vincent, but you know how those two are with letter writing.”

The other two girls nodded in commiseration. Their remaining two year mates, Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle, were the strong and silent type, with emphasis on ‘silent’. Oh, they were loyal friends, certainly, but their intelligence left a fair bit to be desired.

Never able to remain silent for long, Desdemona brightened slightly at the idea of potentially unknown news. “Oh, Rosie, have you heard about the Azkaban breakout? Sirius Black managed to escape, and it has all of magical Britain in an uproar!”

Roisin and Millicent gave her a joint Look. “I thought we were trying to avoid unpleasant topics, Desdemona. How is anything related to Azkaban a good thing?”

“Don’t call me Rosie. To answer your question; yes, the escape was on the Muggle news as well. I’ve been meaning to ask, is Sirius Black related to the Ancient and Noble House of Black that Draco’s mother is from?”

A familiar sardonic voice spoke up from behind them. “Sadly, yes. He and Mother were cousins. ‘White sheep of the Black family’, she calls him.”

Roisin finished signing her name at the bottom of the parchment and looked up to see her housemate, along with Theo, Crabbe and Goyle. “Hello, all of you. How were your holidays?”

Theo pulled up a chair and joined them. “Fine so far. How have yours been, stuck with the Muggles?”

Roisin cringed slightly. “Don’t ask.”

Roisin should have known that the statement could not have been anything less than counter-productive. As it was, Draco immediately sat down on the remaining chair. “That bad? Come on, tell us what happened.”

Roisin shot him a withering scowl, but sighed and gave in. "First of all, do you have any idea how much extra-credit work I have to do if I don't want to repeat last year? That's a second essay for Lockhart, and we all know his essay subject choices, and extra work from Professor McGonagall, and Charms, Herbology, Potions and all the rest."

Theo winced. "Ouch. As if being Petrified in the first place wasn't bad enough."

Roisin nodded emphically. "Then, just to make things worse, my Aunt had to come for a visit. I managed to escape for Lughnasadh, and I still wanted to disembowel someone with a spoon before it was over. The only good thing about the whole mess was when Harry accidentally inflated her for insulting Aunt Lily and her husband."

As Roisin had mentally predicted, this gem of information prompted delighted reactions from everyone. Possibly the most unexpected and bizarre came from Draco. "Potter blew up his aunt? Good for him!"

Such a statement from Draco Malfoy resulted in a stunned silence from the rest of the group. Glaring at his shocked companions, the blond boy defended himself. "What? Just because I don't like Potter doesn't mean I can't approve of this action."

Roisin knew that Draco and her cousin would never be friends, but perhaps this could be a step in the direction of occasional civility toward each other? Well, no one had said that she couldn't be occasionally optimistic. Looking around at the rest of the table, Roisin smiled; it was good to be back among friends.

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A/N: Yes, I know it's been way too long since I updated. Hopefully this chapter makes up for it. Part of the reason was the total absence of reviews, as I tend to take inspiration and ideas for improvement from constructive criticism.

I heard a wonderful quote from a fellow fanfic author that seems to fit here: When you are paying my salary, you have the right to impose deadlines. Until then, hush.

Disclaimer: As usual.

Summary: See previous chapters.

Chapter Four

The remainder of the holidays passed more or less quietly, and soon it was time to leave for Hogwarts. Michael, Nessa and Fionna had shown up, along with Mary and Seamus, planning to do their School Shopping (thankfully only a few books) the day before leaving, and then spend the night in the Leaky Cauldron before taking Roisin and her twin cousins to Kings Cross in the morning.

On the other hand, this landed their arrival only an hour or so after the Weasley family, thus making an already chaotic situation (where the Weasley Twins were, chaos always followed) even more so. Roisin took the path of least resistance and hid with Fionna in the room that she and Harry had been sharing.

Kings Cross station was not that far away from the Leaky Cauldron, so, rather than brave the London traffic, the O'Connors opted to walk to the station. With September 1st being the starting date of many other boarding schools, and many students preferring to use the train to get to wherever their school was located, a group of six carrying suitcases was not an unusual sight.

Walking through the barrier to platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, un-noticed in the rush of people, Roisin moved away from the entrance just in time to be seen reeling backwards from a collision with Desdemona. A harried looking Theo came running up behind her. "Hi Roisin. Sorry about Desdemona; she conned Goyle into getting her a cup of coffee before she met up with the rest of us.

Roisin winced as she reached out to catch and slow down Seamus, who had taken the barrier at a run, as he hurtled past them. "Remind me to hex him later. Des, will you please calm down before I have to tie you down? Thanks."

Perhaps it was the fact that Roisin had yet to make an idle threat that penetrated Desdemona's caffeine induced frenzy, or perhaps not. Either way, she slowed down considerably, long enough for the rest of the Slytherin Third Years to catch up. Greetings were exchanged, Greg was the recipient of several glares and Roisin dawdled on the platform long enough to make sure that Harry actually came through this year. A glance at the clock revealed fifteen minutes before the train would leave, so Roisin gave her grandmother one last hug, waved to Michael and Nessa, and led the way to find an empty compartment.

Finding an empty compartment was surprisingly easy this year. There was always at least one confrontation before the train left the station, and since fights attracted crowds like bees to honey, all the Third Years had to do was wait for a few students to run out of their compartment.

After that, it was a simple matter of checking to see if someone had been sensible to stay behind to mind the compartment. If the compartment was empty, they removed the previous occupant's luggage into the corridor and took over the compartment for themselves.

The story and speculation of Sirius Black, which seemed to be all everyone else was talking about, was already an old topic, so discussion quickly turned to Hogwarts related things, such as who would be teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts this year, and what they were planning to do on the first Hogsmeade weekend.

Greg and Vince couldn't wait to get to Honeydukes, to no-ones surprise, and Theo, Draco and Millicent insisted on going to see the Shrieking Shack, which Pansy instantly vetoed as an inappropriate destination for a proper young witch. Desdemona retaliated by asking if Pansy was scared of the ghosts, and Roisin quickly intervened before Pansy could reach for her wand. "If we want to look for ghosts, there are already at least twenty in Hogwarts itself. As for violent spirits, Peeves is more than enough for me, thanks ever so."

Pansy and Desdemona cast haughty and disdainful glares at each other, but dropped the issue, dragging Theo, Millicent and Draco into

a lively debate on the Three Broomsticks Vs. Madam Puddifoot's. Seeing Millicent narrow her eyes at Blaise, who had thus far managed to avoid the discussion, Roisin quickly asked him how summer in Italy had been.

Blaise instantly he started a detailed story of who had said what to offend whom, and what had been done in retaliation. Giggling at the description of a curse Mrs. Zabini had used when a distant cousin had made a crass remark about the notorious beauty having siren blood in her veins, Roisin tried to ignore the warm glow that had spread through her when Blaise flashed her a warm smile.

Around one in the afternoon, the food trolley came around, piled with pumpkin pasties, cauldron cakes and sweets of many different kinds. The other Third Years pounced on the food, but Roisin sat back with a sigh, digging in her purse for the lunch that Fionna had insisted she bring, rather than buy off the trolley.

At the end of last year, Seamus had made the mistake of telling his parents about all of the delicious, but not entirely healthy, selection of food served on the Hogwarts Express. Michael and Nessa had been properly horrified, so this trip, the three of them had been stuck with Shepard's Pie in an ever-warm bag and several pieces of fruit. The twins had complied with the intention of leaving the parcels behind, but their parents had expected that, and given several extra reminders so that none of the cousins could 'accidentally forget' about the packed lunches and leave them behind.

Luckily for Roisin, Millicent had a weakness for oranges, and offered to swap her a cauldron cake in exchange.

An hour or so later, Draco dragged Crabbe and Goyle off for his obligatory 'annoy and taunt Harry Potter' trip, while the girls took the opportunity to kick Blaise and Theo out while they changed into their robes.

It took less time than usual for the trio to come back, sulking, with Draco muttering under his breath about 'Pothead hiding behind the new teacher' and 'Weasels being far too easy'. Roisin simply rolled her eyes and was about to tell Draco to sit down and shut up when

the train started to slow and an intense cold, worse than the usual chill that accompanied heavy storms, swept over them.

Shivering, Roisin huddled closer to Desdemona, hoping to warm up slightly. To everyone's dismay, it only got colder as the door slid open to reveal a towering, cloaked figure. It drew a deep, rattling breath as it looked around the compartment, and Roisin felt as though she were being surrounded by a thick, all-encompassing fog, weighing down her limbs and sucking the joy out of her. Her eyes rolled back and she found herself drowning in memories...

She was five. Dudley had hit her, and Mummy and Daddy insisted that he had only gotten a little carried away with his own strength. Roisin had stormed away into her secret corner of the garden and burst into tears. Dudley was her twin! Twins were supposed to love each other, not hit just because she had danced in front of the telly when Dudley's favorite show was on!

She was six. Another funny thing had happened at school that day, and now she was eavesdropping outside the kitchen as her parents argued about Roisin being a 'freak'. But there was nothing wrong with her! Perhaps she had a bigger imagination than the rest of the family, but her teachers were always saying that that was a good thing! Was it really so bad that her parents would stop loving her because of it?

She was eleven. Her Hogwarts letter had arrived, promising everything she had ever dreamed of, but with the immense downside of being completely ostracized by her family. If Nana Fionna hadn't been part of the Magical world too, she would have been tempted to write Hogwarts and withdraw his acceptance. Was isolation from everyone who had once loved to be the price of her dreams?

After what seemed like a lifetime, the cloaked figure left and the cold slowly started to fade away. Looking around at the other Third Years, who were looking as shaken as she was, Roisin tried to stop her voice from trembling. "What – what was that thing?"

Blaise also made a visible effort to pull himself together, wrapping an arm around her as Draco answered. "A Dementor. They guard Azkaban prison, and make you re-live all of your worst memories. My

father had to visit Azkaban once or twice; I think he was accompanying the Minister, and he came back pale and shaking.”

Millicent nodded in agreement, rummaging through her bag and coming up with a large block of chocolate, which she broke into pieces and started handing out. “Chocolate helps to relieve the effects, but no-one goes near one of those monsters, if they can help it.”

Pansy curled up against Draco, who for once didn’t seem to mind the contact. “I’m just glad it isn’t much further to Hogwarts. I’d cheerfully kill for a fire, a hot bath, and no chance of running into any more Dementors.”

Sadly, Pansy’s wish was not to be granted that night. The Hogwarts Express pulled into Hogsmeade station, and there was a mad rush to get off the train and into the carriages. For a few minutes, it seemed like the Dementor incident would soon be little more than a particularly bad memory, but that illusion was shattered when the carriage pulled up to Hogwarts and they saw two more Dementors flanking the great wrought-iron gates. Shivering again, Roisin clutched Blaise’s hand and hurried up the stone steps and into the castle.

Still very shaken by the Dementors, no-one paid very much attention to the Sorting Song, or to the sorting itself, with the occasional exception of polite applause whenever a student was sorted into Slytherin. The lackluster welcome was probably a bit off-putting to the six new first years, but they could apologize for that later.

Everyone sat up and started paying attention, however, when Dumbledore rose to give the Beginning of Term announcements. Roisin personally was just longing to hear why they had Dementors surrounding the school. The candle-light flickered above them as the Headmaster began his speech. “Welcome to another year at Hogwarts! I have a few things to say to you all, and as one is very serious, I think it best to get them out of the way before our minds become fuddled with this excellent feast. As you will all be aware after their search of the Hogwarts Express, our school is presently

playing host to some of the Dementors of Azkaban, who are here on Ministry of Magic business.”

Those dreadful things were going to be at Hogwarts for an extended period? The Slytherin Third Years were not the only ones exchanging horrified glances as Dumbledore continued. “They are stationed at every entrance to the school grounds, and while they are with us, I must make it plain that no one is to leave Hogwarts without permission. Dementors are not fooled by tricks or disguises, or even invisibility cloaks. It is not in a Dementor’s nature to understand pleading or excuses. I therefore warn each and every one of you to give them no reason to harm you. I look to our Prefects, and to our new Head Boy and Girl, to ensure that no student runs foul of the Dementors.”

If the students in question were not smart enough to avoid those creatures of their own violation, Roisin worried for the future. She certainly wasn’t planning to go anywhere near them, and she had no doubt that the other Slytherins were feeling the same way.

Meanwhile, Dumbledore had not finished his speech. “On a happier note, I am pleased to welcome two new teachers to our ranks. First is Professor Remus Lupin, who has consented to be our Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher this year.” (Scattered applause) “The second is Professor Rubeus Hagrid, who will be taking over from Professor Kettleburn, now that he has decided to retire in order to enjoy life with his remaining limbs.” (Louder applause and not a few giggles.) “Now, let the feast begin!”

In the Slytherin Common Room not long after the Welcome-To-Slytherin-orientation, several small conversations were being whispered in the remaining half-hour before curfew. Most of them centered on the presence of the Dementors, and suggestions of why they were at Hogwarts.

However, Dementors were high on the list of things that Roisin did not want to talk about, so when she spotted Mary yawning, but clearly reluctant to go to her Dormitory by herself, Roisin excused herself from the conversation and walked over to her cousin. “Come on, Mary. It’s been a long day for everyone, and I want to go to bed.”

Recognizing this for the excuse that it was, but not particularly caring, Mary nodded and took Roisin's hand. Feeling like a small child again, after a particularly bad nightmare, and knowing that her cousin felt the same, Roisin took the extra time to tuck Mary into bed, and stayed with her until she was asleep.

Standing and quietly exiting the room, Roisin sent up an absent prayer of thanks that her own dorm was only a few meters down the hall and on the opposite side. Quickly changing into her nightgown and brushing her teeth, Roisin re-entered the room to find that Desdemona and Millicent (Pansy was still in the bathroom) had pushed the beds to the side and were carefully arranging their mattresses in the middle of the floor.

Roisin remembered doing this with Dudley once or twice, when something bad or scary had happened, before her twin had become 'too old' for such things. After the day's events, however, Roisin had no objections to sleeping together, and levitated her own mattress to join theirs.

Deciding that she wasn't too old to sleep with her Cabbage-Patch doll, after all, Roisin tucked Jackie under one arm and wriggled under the thick covers, feeling Desdemona curl up beside her. Glad for the comfort, Roisin closed her eyes, falling asleep almost instantly.

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A/N: Latest chapter is up! Yes, I know it's been forever since I updated this story, but things have been busy. I know the ending might seem a bit rushed, but I probably won't have access to my computer for the next several days (My sister crashed hers and needs one for Uni.) so I decided to post this one now.

Reviews boost my ego and Constructive Criticism is welcomed. Tell me what you liked, what you hated, and where I need to improve.

On another note, I don't know when I'll be updating next. My best friend was the victim of domestic violence, so I'm leaving in about two hours to help her take out an AVO. For obvious reasons, I doubt that I'll have much time to write in the near future.

Thanks,
Nat.

Disclaimer: As usual.

Summary: See previous chapters.

Chapter Five

The first morning into term, the Third Years discovered that there were far worse things to worry about than Dementors.

For one thing, the boys had decided to check on how the girls were faring after the Dementor scare, only to learn the hard way that there would be no more meeting in the Girl's Dormitory for private discussions. Two statues, of the Greek Goddesses Athena and Artemis, now guarded the corridor leading to their rooms, and attacked any boy over thirteen who came near them.

The first time it happened, the screams had brought half the house running to see who was being murdered. Once Demetra and Tiberius had stopped laughing at the Third Year boys' affronted expressions and calmed down enough to speak normally, they explained what was going on.

Apparently, this was perfectly normal. It seemed that the Four Founders had decided to add some fail-safes to the Student Dormitories, and put up wards on every way to Third Year Dorms and up.

The nature of the wards varied from House to House, as well. Rumor had it that the staircase to the Gryffindor Girl's Dorms was charmed to turn into a slide whenever a boy tried to go up. Hufflepuff currently had the same charm on each Female Dorm, but changed it every few years. No one was entirely sure about Ravenclaw, but hadn't really bothered to find out lately.

Slytherin, however, had been a bit more paranoid. The Gryffindor wards, for example, could probably be overcome by a simple levitation charm. Slytherin, on the other hand, had been sneakier, placing a different means of deterration on each year, with an extra

charm to switch at random intervals, never longer than a few months. This meant that while Third Years currently had the two statues, they could easily change to one of the other four protections at any time. The extra charm had been put in place so that the male students couldn't plan a way around the protection and get good enough to actually succeed before the protection was switched.

At the moment, Fourth Years had it best. The charm on their door resulted in a series of hexes and curses, starting with something like a boils hex and steadily working up to things like human transfiguration. Luckily, the culprit usually got the picture before they got turned into a minnow or something equally embarrassing.

Seventh Years had a spell that turned any teenaged male neon-purple and started shrieking an alarm. The Sixth Years had something that covered intruders with a foul-smelling slime that didn't wash off until they were found and dealt with. The Fifth Years had a gargoyle that sang loudly enough that everyone in the Common Room and other Dorms would come running just to shut the bloody thing off. The song was changed every once in a while to the most annoying song the caster could think of. The most recent change (Roisin suspected a cruel and sadistic half-blood) was the theme-song from 'Barney: The purple dinosaur'.

Whatever their Founder's faults, you couldn't deny his viciously creative streak.

Luckily, the Founder's had a bit more faith in a girl's judgment and ability to defend her virtue than they did in a boy's ability to resist temptation, so meeting in the boy's dorms was still possible.

The Prefects had sent the boys down to wait in the Common Room, while the girls rushed through morning preparations, still giggling, and grabbed their bags before heading off to breakfast.

Draco's consistent taunting of Harry led to dramatic displays of pretending to faint at the breakfast table. Given their own less-than-pleasant experience with Dementors, this did not come off as amusing as Draco might have hoped. A few Slytherins laughed, probably trying to cover up their own reactions to the incident, but

most simply glared at Draco for being immature. Roisin, visiting the Gryffindor Table to check on Seamus, regally ignored him and advised all three of her cousins (Mary was sitting with her brother) to do the same.

Returning to the Slytherin Table, Roisin sat down and helped herself to a toasted muffin, reaching for the mulberry jam just as schedules were being passed down the table. A quick glance showed that she had Arithmancy first, followed by Transfiguration, then lunch, and finally Care of Magical Creatures and a free period before dinner.

After a quick breakfast, Draco left for Politics; Pansy, Desdemona, Crabbe and Goyle started the long trek to the Divination Tower; and Blaise, Theo and Millicent joined Roisin in searching for the Arithmancy classroom.

Someone had a subtle sense of humor, as the Arithmancy classroom was located in the seventh room in the fourth corridor on the third floor.

Despite the fact that they had only found this out by asking directions from an amused Grey Lady, who had laughed and said that they should search their Arithmancy texts, then spent ten minutes figuring out what she meant, then doing the necessary calculations, they were still among the first to arrive.

Being an elective, the Arithmancy class was composed of students from all four houses. There was Hermione Granger and Dean Thomas from Gryffindor, Ernie Macmillan and Susan Bones from Hufflepuff and Terry Boot, Padma Patil and two others Roisin didn't know from Ravenclaw. Ironically enough, given their reputation as the 'brains' of Hogwarts, the Ravenclaws were the last to arrive.

The class began with a brief explanation of what Arithmancy was and the various things that could be accomplished by it, followed by a mathematical quiz to see what level the students were at, which no-one had been expecting.

Roisin had never been a genius with algebra and area calculations, but she was very good at the more common elements of addition,

subtraction, multiplication and division. With Beginner's Arithmancy mostly based on these elements, Roisin looked to be off to a good start. It would have been even easier if they didn't have to show workings, but there you were. Question 1. $(24 \times 7) + (12 \times 13)$.

7×4 28, 7×20 140. $28 + 140$ 168. 12×10 120, 12×3 36. $120 + 36$ 156. $168 + 156$ 224.

Question 1. Answer: 224

Question 2. $13 \times 13 \times 13 \dots$

After an hour of increasingly complex equations, the ten students stumbled out of the classroom, House Rivalry forgotten in the face of overwhelming headaches.

Roisin, Dean and Hermione, all having attended a Muggle School System that placed Maths as a core subject, had not found it too hard, but decided to take the diplomatic approach and let the purebloods have their fun complaining.

Resorting to the 'smile and nod' response as Theo started on an even more detailed complaint, Roisin contented herself with inward laughter as she led the way to Transfiguration.

Transfiguration started with a lecture on Animagi, but Roisin noticed that several of the students were paying more attention to Harry, mostly giving him sympathetic looks, than they were to Professor McGonagall.

Roisin wasn't the only one to have noticed, as the Professor turned herself into a Tabby cat and frowned as she resumed her normal form with a faint 'pop', looking around at the class. "Really, what has gotten into all of you today? Not that it matters, but that's the first time my transformation hasn't received applause from a class."

The distracted students looked at each other, before Hermione raised her hand. "Please, Professor, we've just had our first Divination class, and we were reading tea leaves, and..."

Roisin frowned, exchanging a confused glance with Blaise. Hermione had been in Arithmancy with them just before Transfiguration, how

could she have had been in Divination? Professor McGonagall also frowned, but in disapproval. "Ah, of course. No need to say any more, Miss Granger. Tell me, which one of you will be dying this year?"

What? The class as a whole stared at her before Harry finally raised a hand. Professor McGonagall fixed him with a look. "I see. You should know, Potter, that Sybil Trelawney has predicted the death of one student per year since she arrived at this school. None of them have died yet. Seeing death omens is her favorite way of greeting a new class. True seers are very rare, and you look in excellent health to me, so you will excuse me if I don't let you off homework today. I assure you that if you die, you need not hand it in."

This prompted a round of laughter, even from Harry, although a few of the Divination students still looked a bit wary, and class resumed as normal.

After Transfiguration, the Slytherins headed down to lunch, the normal 'first-day-back' chatter punctuated by telling Desdemona to shut up about Death Omens, especially as Harry had so far managed to get himself into, and somehow survive, life-threatening situations at least once a year, and the whole castle knew it.

Taking a steaming mini-Shepard's pie from a platter and blowing on a steaming fork-full, Roisin mentioned something that had been bothering her. "Hermione said that they had just come from Divination, but she was in Arithmancy with us for the first period. How does that work?"

Having switched Goyle's steak-and-kidney pie with a nearby Seventh-Year's steak-and-guinness pie, Desdemona eagerly watched her year mate's face, absently offering a suggestion. "Time-turner, maybe? Only thing I can think of that would let you be in two places at once."

Biting back a giggle as Goyle pulled a spectacular face at the changed taste and spat the mouthful of pie into a napkin, Pansy shot down the suggestion. "Those things are Ministry-Restricted. There is no way a thirteen-year-old with no connections is going to get her

hands on a time-turner, especially for something as simple as taking an extra class!”

Conceding the point, Desdemona went back to looking amused at Goyle, stopped when she noticed the glare he gave her, and struck up a conversation on what they thought Care of Magical Creatures, a class that everyone except Millicent, Theo and Blaise were taking, would be like.

Given that Hagrid was known for befriending Acromantulas and three-headed dogs, there was a lot to speculate about.

Previous Care of Magical Creatures classes had supposedly taken place in the fields on the other side of the school from the Greenhouses. This year’s Care of Magical Creatures classes were apparently going to be taken down near Professor Hagrid’s hut, near the Forbidden Forest. Roisin had never been to the Forbidden Forest, but if Desdemona and Draco’s terrified stories were to be believed, she probably wanted to keep it that way.

Worse still, Roisin easily spotted a certain Gryffindor Trio ahead of them, which promised trouble in an already potentially-chaotic class.

Hagrid was waiting for them outside his cabin, and while Roisin didn’t mind the giant man, and valued his loyalty toward Harry, she didn’t quite trust Hagrid’s definition of what was safe and appropriate for a first lesson. Biting back her apprehension, Roisin quickened her pace as Hagrid called for the class to get a move on. “Got a real treat for you today. Great lesson coming up. Everyone here? Right, follow me!”

Perhaps it was just Roisin, but she really preferred when Professors spoke in complete and comprehensible sentences. Trying not to sigh, she exchanged looks with Desdemona as they followed Hagrid around to the paddock behind the hut. Unless they were studying something that could be invisible, like demiguises or thestrals, the paddock was empty.

Roisin exchanged another look, this time with Pansy, as Hagrid called for the class to come closer. “Everyone gather ‘round the fence here.

That's it, make sure yeh can see. Now, the first thing you'll want to do is open your books –“

The last time Roisin had tried to open the Monster Book of Monsters she had nearly lost her hand when the vicious book tried to bite it off! Her book was currently trussed up tighter than a fly in a spider-web, and if the other students' expressions were anything to go by, she hadn't been the only one to have had trouble. Draco, however, was the one who actually voiced the question. “How?”

This stopped Hagrid short, obviously not expecting that any of them would have had trouble. “Eh?”

Draco took out his own Monster Book of Monsters, which had been bound shut with a length of rope. Looking around the class, Roisin could see every other book in a similar condition; clamped closed with belts, rope, bull clips, or crammed into a tight bag. Draco repeated the question, “How do we open our books?”

Hagrid looked crestfallen. “Hasn' – hasn' anyone been able ter open their books?”

Everyone shook their heads, and Hagrid sighed, as though the solution was the most obvious thing in the world. “Yeh've got to stroke them. Look –“

Hagrid grabbed Hermione's book (Roisin was a few seconds slow in offering her own), ripped off the spellotape that held it closed, and ran a huge finger down the spine. To Roisin's surprise and slight annoyance, the book shivered, then fell open and lay quietly in his hand. Draco was equally annoyed, if his tone was any indication. “Oh, how silly we've all been! We should have stroked them! Why didn't we guess?”

Hagrid was looking rather uncertain as Draco continued to express his annoyance until Harry told him to shut up. Hagrid seemed to have lost his thread now, but pulled himself together. “Right then. So...yeh've got yer books... now yeh'll be needing the Magical Creatures. Yeah. I'll just be getting them then...”

Hagrid disappeared into the forest, and Roisin tried to decide if she should be relieved or disappointed. She had been looking forward to this class, and as much as she respected Hagrid, he didn't seem to have the makings of a teacher. Not for the first time, she decided that Draco needed to learn tact, and that disapproval of certain things did not need to be discussed at the top of One's voice. "God, this place is going to the dogs. That oaf teaching classes? My father will have a fit when I tell him..."

Sadly, Roisin was forced to admit that Mr. Malfoy wouldn't be the only one likely to be upset. Roisin's 'Aunt' Nessa had also attended Hogwarts, and was unlikely to take this news well. Even if Roisin held off writing to them, it was a sure bet that either Mary or Seamus had already sent off a letter to tell them of the new Professors.

Meanwhile, yet another confrontation was brewing between Draco and Harry, who had taken offense on Hagrid's behalf. "Shut up, Malfoy!"

Honestly, the two of them needed to work on thinking up original insults and banter. "Careful, Potter, there's a Dementor behind you..."

The class looked to be bad enough on its own, Roisin didn't need infantile bickering on top of it. "Both of you be quiet! The next person to throw an insult is going to be on the receiving end of the worst thing I can come up with!"

Both Harry and Draco had seen and experienced what Roisin could come up with when annoyed, and fell silent just as Hagrid returned, leading a herd (flock?) of bizarre-looking creatures that had the back half of a horse and the front half of an eagle. They had cruel, steel-colored beaks, brilliant orange eyes and six-inch-long talons. Everyone drew back slightly as Hagrid brought them closer and tied them to the fence.

"Hippogryffs!" Hagrid announced happily, waving a hand at the creatures. "Beautiful, aren't they?"

Once you managed to look past the lethal appearance, Roisin had to agree with the last point. The gleaming coats changed almost

seamlessly from feather to hair, in shades ranging from stormy-grey, to bronze, to inky black, and everything in between. It was like the cliffs of Moher; potentially deadly, but still utterly breathtaking.

Roisin snapped out of her daze and went very pale at Hagrid's next words. "So, if yeh all want to come a bit nearer..."

For some reason, no one did. Eventually, the Gryffindor Trio approached, but it was obvious that their actions were more out of loyalty to Hagrid than any particular desire to get close to the Hippogryffs.

Undeterred, Hagrid began the lecture. "Now, the first thing yeh need to know about Hippogryffs is that they're proud. Easily offended, they are. Don't never insult one, because it might be the last thing yeh ever do.

This was not reassuring, but Hagrid continued, seemingly oblivious to his students' dismay. "Yeh always wait for the Hippogryff to make the first move. It's polite, see? Yeh walk toward them, and yeh bow, and yeh wait. If he bows back, then yeh're allowed ta touch him. If he doesn't bow, then back away sharpish, because those talons hurt. Right, who wants to go first?"

Unsurprisingly, most of the class retreated even further, and even Harry, Ron and Hermione looked reluctant. The Hippogryffs were tossing their fierce heads and flexing their wings, and did not look at all happy about being tethered up. Hagrid didn't look much happier, giving them all a pleading look, "No one?"

Harry suddenly stepped forward. "I'll do it."

Some day soon, Roisin was going to sit Harry down and give him a Serious Talk about the difference between extreme bravery and sheer foolishness. Either indifferent to or blithely unaware of Roisin's dismayed expression and everyone else's warnings, Harry climbed over the fence as Hagrid un-collared the grey Hippogryff.

Hagrid's voice was soft as Harry approached. "Easy now, Harry. Yeh've got eye contact, now try not to blink... Hippogryffs don't trust yeh if yeh blink too much..."

Roisin whimpered softly, mentally drafting a letter to inform her family that Harry had been mauled. Telling someone not to blink was practically a guarantee that they would blink. Harry bowed and Roisin saw Desdemona shield her eyes as the Hippogryff only stared at her cousin. Hagrid's tone turned worried and started urging Harry to back away.

Roisin tried not to look, but eventually glanced up as she heard several sighs of relief. The Hippogryff had bent its scaly front legs into an unmistakable bow. Hagrid now sounded completely ecstatic. "Well done, Harry. Right, yeh can touch him now. Pat his beak, go on."

Anyone with even the faintest skill at reading faces could tell that Harry would have much preferred to back away, but slowly approached the Hippogryff and patted its beak as the rest of the class burst into applause. Harry looked as relieved as the rest of them, but quickly changed to something very akin to panic as Hagrid announced that Buckbeak (the Hippogryff) would probably let Harry ride him now, and promptly hoisted the unfortunate Gryffindor onto the Hippogryff's back.

Hagrid slapped Buckbeak on the rump and the creature instantly launched itself into the air, Harry holding on tight. Deciding that trying to watch was only going to give her a panic attack, Roisin sank onto a nearby rock, opened the Monster Book of Monsters, and started to read up on Hippogryffs.

Luckily for all concerned, Harry came back to solid ground in one piece, to loud and relieved cheering. On the downside, now that Harry had proved that it could be done, the rest of the class had no choice but to follow his example and try to approach the Hippogryffs. Roisin was just patting the bronze Hippogryff, Swiftwing, accompanied by a very reluctant Pansy, when a commotion sprung up on the opposite side of the paddock.

The first Hippogryff, Buckbeak, had let out a screech of fury and moved in a flash of steely talons. Seconds later, he was matched by a high-pitched scream from Draco, who was suddenly lying curled on the grass, blood all over his robes. "I'm dying! I'm dying, look at me! It's killed me!"

The class panicked, with the Slytherins rushing over to their injured year mate, Pansy almost as hysterical as Draco. Hagrid had gone very white as he also rushed over, having wrestled Buckbeak back into his collar. "Yer not dying. Someone help me – gotta get him out of here –"

Roisin just beat Hermione in a rush to open the gate as Hagrid sprinted up to the castle, carrying Draco, who everyone could now see had a huge, deep gash on his arm. The rest of the class followed at a walk, with Roisin and Desdemona trying to calm Pansy as the rest of the class started arguing about whether Hagrid or Draco was to blame. Roisin wished they would stop arguing about the blame long enough to think about the potential consequences of the fiasco. And there would be consequences.

It didn't take long for the shaken class to reach the Castle, where Madam Pomfrey kicked the Slytherins out of the Hospital Wing, sending them back to their Common Room. Grumbling darkly, they went down and joined Blaise, Millicent and Theo, who had only chosen two electives and were waiting for the others to finish Care of Magical Creatures.

Quickly explaining the disaster in Care of Magical Creatures, the Third Years gathered their books and homework assignments and quickly headed back up and across the castle to the Hospital Wing, where they lurked outside until Madam Pomfrey let them back in

Draco was sitting on a bed, his arm heavily bandaged and looking extremely sulky. The other Third Years had barely sat down before Draco launched into a rant about the nurse refusing to let him out until Thursday. Three days to be spent in the bland Hospital Wing! Pansy, Crabbe and Goyle listened with rapt attention, while the others sat back and waited for him to finish.

Used to the Malfoy Heir's rants, and of the quiet opinion that in this case he deserved both the injury and the Hospital stay, Roisin opened her Transfiguration book and started her Animagi essay. "It's strange; becoming an Animagus looks complex and difficult, but could be done with enough time and effort. Why would there only be seven Animagi in a century?"

Blaise threw back his head and laughed outright. "There have been seven registered animagi this century, Rose. The ministry is mad if they think more than one wizard in ten actually registers their form. That's why there's such a heavy fine for being caught if you don't register."

Crabbe backed this up. "He's right. I can name at least five people off the top of my head that are animagi, and not one of them is registered."

Desdemona lit up like a luminous charm and gave Roisin an excited glance. "So, who wants to make that our goal before finishing school?"

For once, she wasn't hit with a quelling glare or a request to shut up. Quite the opposite, as the rest of the Third Years grinned. Grinning, Draco used his good arm to reach for a fresh sheet of parchment, "I know we have some animagus texts in the library at home. I'll ask Mother to owl me some copies."

Roisin copied Draco's example, as did most of the others. "I found a reference to animagi when I was doing my extra-credit essay for McGonagall over the summer. I'll ask Nana if she knows any books I could use."

hp

hp

hp

hp

A/N: I know the Animagus plot-point has been done to death, but think about it. There are seven registered Animagi in the 1900's, but we have Moony, Padfoot and Prongs becoming Animagi in their fifth year, not to mention Rita Skeeter. That's at least four unregistered Animagi, and if a group of students can do it before they even reach their OWLs, then I refuse to believe that no-one else has tried it. James and Sirius were described as 'exceptionally bright', but they can't be the only clever ones in all of Hogwarts.

A/N: One of my few pet peeves is net-speak, and I honestly prefer no reviews to something like 'I luv the wA u write. update l8r', which tells me all of nothing about the actual story, and becomes annoying after the first few repetitions. Also, if you have a question for me to answer or want a reply, give me some way of contacting you, be it e-mail or logged in for a review reply or PM. I'll happily answer questions, but I need some way to actually tell you the answer.

Anyway, despite the long Author's Note, this chapter is finally up and I'll try not to take so long with the next one. If anyone has extra ideas for Slytherin Boggarts, let me know!

Thanks,

Nat

Chapter Six

Out of the corner of her eye, Roisin saw Blaise scowling at his Arithmancy homework and bit back a smile. Their homework for the week was to go over the problems they had missed in the initial quiz, show where they had gone wrong, and find the correct answer.

Roisin had not done well on the geometry questions, of which there were thankfully few, but she had still scored one of the highest in the class, as the pure-blood-raised had always opted for Magic over Maths. Having Owled Fionna with a request for a geometry book along with the Animagus ones, Roisin was putting her Arithmancy homework off until it arrived. As their next Arithmancy class was on Friday, she had time to get her other assignments out of the way first.

This left her busy completing her Transfiguration essay in the Common Room while trying to convince Draco that calling Minister Fudge an 'easily influenced imbecile' was probably not an acceptable answer to his politics essay. Really, if you were going to insult highly-placed people, there were much better ways to do it. Not to mention ways that were less likely to get you arrested, no matter how much influence your father had.

Roisin saw Blaise get up from the table he was sharing with Millicent and Theo and head in her direction. As he pulled out a chair and sat down beside her, Roisin fought away the warm flush in her cheeks, which had been making an annoying habit of appearing whenever Blaise was nearby. "Hey, Roisin, could you help me with Arithmancy? I can't get the long equations."

Apparently, there was a lot of geometry and angles involved in Curse-Breaking, and Blaise had done well in that part. It would be a fair trade, so Roisin pulled out her own Arithmancy test. "If you can help me with the geometric ones, sure. What were you having trouble with?"

Blaise pointed out Question 4: $(24 \times 3) \times (36 - 9)$. "I don't understand what the brackets are for. I tried $24 \times 3 \times 36 - 9$, but Professor Vector marked it wrong."

Considering that there was a 778 difference, Roisin would have been shocked if it was marked right. “All right. The brackets separate the individual equations. The first equation is 24×3 , which is 72, then you have the second equation of $36 - 9$, which is 27. Now all you have to do is multiply 72 by 27.”

Blaise nodded and began muttering under his breath as he worked out this problem, then winced as he discovered the numerical margin between the two answers. Roisin managed to hide a grin as she pointed out her geometry problem. “Right, so I get angles, but how does ABD equal DAB?”

Blaise had opened his mouth to explain when Crabbe spoke up from the next table over. “Can you take it somewhere else? Just listening to you is hurting my brain!”

This prompted a round of smothered laughter from anyone close enough to hear, and an excited squeal from Pansy, who had just returned from visiting Draco in the Hospital wing. “Ooooh, take what where? Did Blaise finally ask you out? Oh, we have to find something for you to wear...”

Roisin’s blush came back full force, and her only consolation was the slight darkening of Blaise’s own cheeks as he told Pansy to go away. Seeing the girl rush to where Desdemona sat, likely to tell her the supposed ‘news’, Roisin barely resisted the urge to bang her head against the table.

On Thursday, Draco returned to classes, right in the middle of potions. Though his arm was bandaged and in a sling, Roisin thought that the ‘Tragic War Hero’ attitude was taking things a bit far. With the way Pansy was fussing, however, not everyone agreed.

Luckily, she was on the other side of the room from any spare tables, and contented herself with a small wave before returning to the task of brewing her own potion (harder than it sounded when temporarily partnered with Goyle and only a few cauldrons away from Neville Longbottom) and a small wince as she noticed Draco setting up

beside Harry and Ron Weasley. Why, why, were Slytherin and Gryffindor always together for classes? It was only asking for trouble.

Checking on the temperature, Roisin passed Goyle the shrivelfig to skin, carefully adding an ounce of powdered bloodwort to the potion, followed by a minced rat spleen, then watched as the potion turned from Olive Green to Forest. Goyle passed her the skinned and chopped shrivelfig, which was added in increasing numbers, with a ratio of one piece for every two stirs.

Trying to ignore the quiet confrontation between Harry, Ron and Draco, Roisin relaxed slightly as the potion turned a bright, acid green. Lowering the flame to a simmer, Roisin started to gather up the used instruments, looking around at the other cauldrons, stopping in shock as she saw Neville's. How in the nine hells did a green potion turn out orange?

Professor Snape seemed to agree as he lifted a ladle of the potion, allowing it to slowly splash back in. "Tell me, Longbottom, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours? Didn't you hear me say, quite clearly, that only one rat spleen was needed? Did I not state plainly that a dash of leech juice would suffice? What do I have to do to make you understand?"

Roisin winced. She understood Professor Snape's harshness with anyone who messed up; Potions were at once delicate and violate, after all, but Neville looked almost ready to cry.

The situation was not helped when Hermione tried to interject, offering to fix it. She probably meant well, but the female third of the Gryffindor Trio tended to come off as insufferable, condescending, and trying to show up everyone else. As unkind as it sounded, there was a reason that Harry and Ron were her only friends.

Professor Snape did not enjoy Hermione's suggestion either. "I do not recall asking you to show off, Miss Granger. Longbottom, at the end of this lesson we will feed a few drops of this potion to your toad, and see what happens. Perhaps that will encourage you to pay attention in the future."

Roisin felt sorry for Neville and his toad, but held to the probably over-optimistic hope that the result, whether good or bad, would result in fewer explosions and melted cauldrons in the future. Checking on her potion again and lowering the flame slightly, Roisin packed up her potion's kit and gathered her ladle, knives and other equipment to wash in the large stone basin.

Rolling up her sleeves, she caught the sound of a Sirius Black discussion about to turn into Harry/Draco Confrontation #?? and tuned them out, barely stopping Desdemona from accidentally grabbing the blade of a knife as she reached for something to scrub, the energetic girl distracted by Crabbe jostling for position at the basin.

Drying her equipment and returning to her station, Roisin had just finished packing everything away and returning her kit to the 'Third-Year Slytherin' storage area when Professor Snape called for them to gather around Neville's cauldron as he tested Neville's Shrinking Solution, which was now at least the appropriate colour.

The Gryffindors looked fearful as Professor Snape picked up the toad and force-fed it a few drops of the Shrinking Solution. Having seen Hermione muttering instructions to Neville in a louder-and-more-obvious-than-she-had-probably-hoped tone, Roisin had little worries about the toad, and was more excited about actually seeing the potion's effects.

There was a small 'pop', and a tadpole was wiggling in Professor Snape's palm. The Gryffindor's burst into cheers. Roisin winced and scowled at Lavender Brown's high-pitched voice inches away from her ear.

Professor Snape looked sour as he took a vial from his robes, turning the tadpole back into a toad. "Five points from Gryffindor." (the cheers stopped.) "I told you not to help him, Miss Granger. Class dismissed."

In Roisin's first year, the DADA Professor was a stuttering incompetent working for a Dark Lord. In Roisin's second year, the DADA Professor was a brainless airhead with an over-inflated opinion of himself. Now they had their first Defense Against the Dark Arts

lesson, and everyone was waiting to see what this year's professor would be like.

Professor Lupin was absent as the students entered the classroom (This year's motif being covered with posters of dangerous magical creatures) and sat down, pulling out books, quills and parchment. They had started speculating on what Professor Lupin might do as a first lesson, when the teacher in question walked in, giving them a vague smile. "Good afternoon. Will you please put all your books back into your bags; today will be a practical lesson. You will only need your wands."

Everyone exchanged looks, unsure of whether to be happy or hesitant. They had had a practical lesson only once before, so this was something new and different. On the other hand, their one practical lesson had been the 'Cornish Pixie Horror of '92', and nothing short of a disaster.

The class followed Professor Lupin out of the classroom, down a deserted corridor and around a corner, where they ran straight into Peeves, who was busy stuffing gum into a keyhole. The sight of the poltergeist prompted mixed reactions from the students, but Professor Lupin only smiled pleasantly. "I'd take that gum out of the keyhole if I were you, Peeves. Mr. Filch won't be able to get to his brooms."

Given the explanation, Roisin was surprised that no one was egging Peeves on, teacher or no teacher present. Caretaker Argus Filch hated the Hogwarts students with a passion, and the feeling was more than mutual, only exceeded by Filch's ongoing battle with Peeves. The poltergeist himself showed no remorse, only blowing a loud, wet raspberry.

Professor Lupin sighed and took out his wand. A quick spell later, and the gum shot out of the keyhole with the force of a bullet, and straight up Peeves's nose. Roisin smirked happily; thanks to the Bloody Baron, Slytherins were seldom bothered by Peeves, but it was nice to see someone get the poltergeist back on occasion. Dean Thomas, a dark-skinned Gryffindor, was the one to actually vocalize the collective thought. "Cool, sir!"

Professor Lupin smiled. "Thank you, Dean. Shall we proceed?"

The students were looking at Professor Lupin with new respect as they followed him down a second corridor and into the Staff-room. Having preferred to talk with her teachers after class or in their office, Roisin looked around with interest, stopping when she saw Professor Snape, who was sitting in an armchair and sneered as he saw the class come in.

Professor Lupin made to shut the door behind them, but Professor Snape made a halting gesture. "Leave it open, Lupin; I'd rather not witness this." He strode past, robes billowing, and stopped as he reached the door. "Possibly no-one's warned you, Lupin, but this class contains Neville Longbottom. I advise you not to trust him with anything dangerous, unless Miss Granger is whispering instructions in his ear."

Ah, it seemed that the two hours between Potions and now had not been long enough for Professor Snape to cool off about Neville's orange attempt and Hermione's forbidden assistance. Neville turned pink, but Professor Lupin merely raised his eyebrows. "I was hoping that Neville would assist me with the first stage of the operation, and I am sure that he will perform admirably."

The class, Neville included, was very obviously not so sure. Professor Snape echoed his previous sentiment, lip curling as he closed the door with a snap. Undeterred, Professor Lupin continued, beckoning the class to the far wall, where there was nothing but an old wardrobe. As Professor Lupin approached, the Wardrobe gave a violent wobble, banging off the wall.

Several people jumped, but Professor Lupin remained calm. "Nothing to worry about. There's only a boggart in there."

A boggart was a magical creature that turned into whatever its victim feared most, so Roisin thought that it really was something to worry about. Her classmates seemed to agree, as Seamus Finnigan eyed the wardrobe apprehensively, Neville's expression turned to one of pure terror, and Draco turned paler than usual and started muttering

under his breath. From what Roisin could hear, he was running through ideas of how to use his injured arm to get out of participating. She didn't blame him.

Either oblivious or ignoring their reactions, Professor Lupin continued his lecture. "Boggarts like dark, enclosed spaces. Wardrobes, the gap beneath beds, the cupboards under sinks –" (Hm, so that's where the 'Monster-under-the-bed' idea came from) "I once came across one that had wedged itself into a grandfather clock. This one moved in yesterday, and I asked the Headmaster if the staff would leave it for me to give my Third Years some practice. So, the first question we must ask is, what is a boggart?"

To no one's surprise, Hermione was the first with her hand in the air. "It is a shape-shifter. It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us the most."

Professor Lupin nodded and Hermione glowed. "Couldn't have put it better myself. So, the boggart sitting in the dark on the other side of the door has not yet assumed a form. It does not know what will frighten us the most, but when I let him out, he will become what each of us most fears."

Neville let out a splutter of terror, but again Professor Lupin ignored it. "This means that we have a huge advantage over the boggart before we even begin. Have you spotted it, Harry?"

Having Hermione bouncing up and down beside you, her hand in the air, had to be very off-putting when you were trying to answer a question, but Harry made a good effort. "Er, because there are so many of us, the boggart won't know what form to take?"

Hermione took her studies way too seriously, looking disappointed as she put down her hand. Professor Lupin nodded. "Precisely. It is always best to have company when dealing with a boggart. It becomes confused. Which should it become – a headless corpse or a flesh-eating slug? I saw a boggart make that very mistake once, turning itself into half a slug. Not even remotely frightening."

There was a wave of giggles as Lupin continued. “The charm to repel a boggart is simple, but requires force of will. You see, what really finishes a boggart off is laughter. What you need to do is force it into a shape that you find amusing. We will practice the charm without wands first. After me, please – Riddikulus!”

Less than thrilled at the idea of facing their worst fears, the students were very enthusiastic as they obediently repeated the charm. Professor Lupin nodded. “Good, very good. But I’m afraid that the word alone is not enough. That’s where you come in, Neville.”

The wardrobe shook again, but not nearly as much as Neville, who was trembling from head to toe as he walked forward, as though heading for the gallows. “Right, Neville, first things first. What would you say frightens you the most?”

Neville looked around wildly, as though begging someone to help him, and had to try several times, and when he spoke his voice was barely above a whisper. “Professor Snape.”

Nearly everyone laughed, but Professor Lupin looked thoughtful. “Professor Snape... hmmm... Neville, I believe you live with your grandmother?”

Roisin didn’t see what that had to do with the conversation, but Neville replied in the affirmative. “Yes... but I don’t want the boggart to turn into her, either.”

Having been subjected many times to stories of when Desdemona had encountered the formidable Longbottom Matriarch, Roisin felt a measure of sympathetic understanding as Professor Lupin shook his head. “No, you misunderstand me. I wonder, could you tell me what sort of clothes your grandmother usually wears?”

Roisin had an idea of where this was going, and winced. Neville looked confused as he answered. “Well, always the same hat... a tall one with a vulture on top... and a long dress – green, normally... and sometimes a fox-fur scarf.”

Professor Lupin nodded, prompting him on. “And a handbag?”

“A big red one,” Neville confirmed, still looking mildly confused.

“Right then,” said Professor Lupin, “Can you picture those clothes very clearly, Neville? Can you see them in your mind’s eye?”

Neville nodded, and Professor Lupin looked pleased. “When the boggart bursts out of the wardrobe, Neville, and sees you, it will assume the form of Professor Snape. You must raise your wand – thus – and cry Riddikulus – and concentrate hard on your grandmother’s clothes. If all goes well, Professor Boggart Snape will be forced into that vulture-topped hat, that green dress, and that red handbag.”

The Gryffindor half of the class shouted with laughter. The Slytherin, and obviously more sensible, half of the class winced. This would not be good. To his credit, Professor Lupin did not smile. “If Neville is successful, the boggart is likely to turn its attention to each of us in turn. I would like each of you to think of what frightens you the most, and come up with a way to force it to be comical.”

Roisin thought hard; what did she fear the most?

She feared dying, certainly, but doesn’t everyone, to an extent? Although Roisin was a quiet girl, she feared being completely alone, but not enough to classify as her worst fear. She feared disappointing the people she cared about, but she had been repeatedly assured by both Housemates and Clan that while they might not always agree with her, she had yet to disappoint anyone.

That was it! Supportive and mildly ‘eccentric’ grandmother aside, growing up with the magic-phobic Dursleys had consequences, and left Roisin with a deeply-buried but very real insecurity that she was nothing more than a ‘freak’ like Harry. Now, how to combat that fear...

Roisin had just smiled, having found a solution, when Professor Lupin called for their attention again. “On the count of three, Neville. One, two, three!”

The wardrobe door sprang open, and Professor Snape stepped out. Neville backed up, mouthing wordlessly, as the potions master stalked relentlessly forward, reaching inside his robes. “R – Riddikulus!” Neville managed to squeak

There was a noise like a whip-crack, and Professor Snape stumbled, now clad in a long, lace-trimmed green dress and a towering hat topped with a moth-eaten vulture. Roisin couldn’t decide whether to be impressed or dismayed; Professor Snape was going to be Very Not Happy about this.

The Gryffindors, of course, roared with laughter as Parvati Patil stepped forward and Professor Snape changed into a huge cobra. A shout of ‘Riddikulus’ and flute music filled the air as the snake began to dance. A burst of laughter made the boggart pause, and Desdemona stepped forward. The cobra changed into an enormous Hungarian Horntail, its mouth open in a roar of fury. Desdemona gulped and pointed her wand at it. “Riddikulus!”

The dragon turned into a puppy, covered with pink ribbons, and Desdemona looked smug as Seamus Finnigan took his turn. The bedecked puppy changed into a tall, skeletal woman with green-tinged skin and floor length black hair. Roisin winced at the memory of Gilderoy Lockhart as the Banshee let out a keening wail. Seamus nearly took a step back, but steadied himself. “Riddikulus!”

The Banshee made a rasping sound, losing her voice, and it was Roisin’s turn. She faced the boggart, gripping her wand tightly. It caught sight of her, and promptly turned into Roisin herself, dressed in the kind of overly girlish muggle outfit that her mother had always tried to force her into. Boggart-Roisin reached into the overly-frilly pink skirt and pulled out a plastic wand that she had seen when her parents had taken her and Dudley to Disney Land a few years ago, waving it uselessly as Dudley and his gang laughed at her.

Oh, now this was just never happening! “Riddikulus!”

Now Boggart-Roisin was wearing the casual day robes that she always wore at the Keep, face shining with pure exhilaration as the

magic flowed through her. Boggart-Roisin lifted her redwood wand and began casting a series of very creative curses.

Watching Dudley turn purple with orange spots and attempt to do a Monty Python Silly-Walk while blowing soap bubbles, the class roared with laughter and the boggart shifted its attention.

More laughter, and Roisin caught sight of Harry grinning broadly as Ron Weasley stepped forward, and the boggart turned into a spider the size of a small lorry. It advanced on Ron, clicking its pincers, and it seemed like the red-head had frozen. Then – “Riddikulus!” The spider’s legs vanished, and several girls screamed and ran out of the way as it rolled over the floor, coming to a stop at Blaise’s feet.

Blaise’s Boggart gave everyone pause. Roisin felt very disturbed as she saw herself lying on the floor, her eyes blank and unfocussed as they stared into nothing. Blaise’s olive complexion turned almost white as Boggart-Roisin changed into a woman who could only be his mother, then into each of his year-mates in turn, all lying still.

This would be one of the few instances that Roisin appreciated her cousin’s impulsive bravery, as Harry took action and shoved Blaise to the side, distracting the Boggart. This, in turn, jerked Professor Lupin out of his stupor, and he leapt forward, the boggart turning into a silvery-white orb, hanging in front of the Professor as he waved his wand almost lazily. “Riddikulus.”

The boggart landed on the floor in the form of a cockroach, and Professor Lupin stepped aside. “Forward, Neville, and finish him off!”

Neville hurried forward, looking determined, and they had another momentary glimpse of Professor Snape in the lacy dress. Then Neville let out a loud laugh, and the boggart exploded into a thousand tiny wisps of smoke, and was gone.

The class broke into applause, and Professor Lupin smiled. “Excellent! Excellent, Neville, and well done, everyone. Five points to everyone who faced the boggart – ten for Neville because he did it twice – and five each to Harry and Hermione, for answering my questions correctly at the beginning of the lesson.”

Roisin had the feeling that Gryffindor would need all the points it could get, once Professor Snape heard about this. The Hogwarts grapevine was far too effective, sometimes. She pulled out her homework diary and quickly wrote down that they had to read and summarize the chapter on Boggarts, then joined the rest of the Slytherins gathered around Blaise, elbowing cheerful Gryffindors out of the way as they quickly headed to the Slytherin Common Room.

They managed to support the Italian boy until they were inside the Common Room, at which point he pulled away from them and bolted up to the Third-Year Boys Dorm, locking and barricading the door behind him.

This left the other Third Years standing uncertainly in the middle of the Common Room as they tried to figure out what to do. For once, Roisin decided on the direct route, stalking up the stairs and casting every unlocking charm she knew at the Boys Dorm until the door opened.

Closing it softly behind her, Roisin spotted Blaise lying on his bed and walked over, sitting down beside him. She could find no words, so simply remained silent, trying to project a sense of comfort. Finally, Blaise spoke. "My Dad was a teacher in a wizard pre-elementary school, my Mum's first husband. He was killed when I was four."

Mrs. Zabini was a famous beauty, but little was known about her husbands, except that they died after leaving her a lot of gold. Roisin took Blaise's hand, letting him continue. "A Muggle-Born wizard had lost his family in the Dark Lord's first reign of terror, and went crazy, taking his loss out on others. He attacked Dad's school on my first week there, supposedly thinking that the Pure-Blooded should know how it felt to lose their children."

That was a horrific thought, and Roisin mentally damned the wizard to the deepest pits of hell as she squeezed Blaise's hand, though he still didn't look at her, speaking in a distant, emotionless voice. "My Dad tried to stop him as we waited for the Aurors to arrive, but the wizard just hit him with the killing curse, as though he were swatting a bug. He fell, less than a meter away from me, and I remember trying

to wake him up, but I couldn't. I could only stand there as an Auror told me he was dead and shooed me away."

Roisin mentally sent the Auror to join the murdering wizard, but Blaise wasn't finished, holding her hand so tightly that Roisin felt her bones creak. "Mum was never the same after that, and my worst fear has always been the people I care about dying, while I can't do anything except stand there. How do you make something like that funny?"

Death wasn't funny in the least, but Roisin tried to come up with something to make Blaise feel better. "I don't know. But Pansy sleeps like the dead, if you'll pardon the horrible metaphor, and you could always try her reaction when Desdemona does something to wake her up."

This prompted a wry smile. While it was not quite the laugh Roisin had been aiming for, it was definitely an improvement. Blaise sat up, giving her a brief hug. "Thanks, Rose. But if you don't mind, I'd like to be alone for a while."

That was understandable. Roisin nodded, "I'll send one of the others to get you when it's time for dinner."

Roisin left as quietly as she had come, but did not go to join the others in the Common Room, instead going to her own dorm and closing the curtains around her bed. For some reason, she felt like she needed a good cry.

hp

hp

hp

hp

A/N: This was a very hard chapter for me to write, relating very closely to the death of my own twin. While Sally drowned, rather than was killed, the first thing I heard was my mother saying that she was

dead, and the next few hours refusing to accept it and trying everything to bring her back. At her funeral, we asked people to donate to the Special Needs Class that my twin attended at high school, and they now have a yearly award in her name. Tomorrow is the presentation ceremony, so forgive me for sounding maudlin.

A/N: ff.n is refusing to let me put up the 'equals' sign in equations, so please bear with mr. Constructive Criticism, as always, is more than welcome, and I apologize if anyone was offended by anything in the boggart scene.

Thanks,
Nat

Chapter Seven

Rumours had a way of spreading, though if Roisin found out who had spilled the beans about the boggart, there was going to be trouble. She wasn't sure what was worse, the nowhere-near-discreet looks of sympathy towards Blaise, or the speculation of why the boggart would have turned into dead classmates.

Those rumours, however, had quickly died down when a Hufflepuff, something-or-other Smith, had said that Blaise was obviously planning something, and was scared of getting caught. The end result was a vicious hexing that landed Smith under Madam Pomfrey's not-so-sympathetic care for a week, and the visibly unrepentant Roisin and Draco in detention for a fortnight.

Neville's boggart, however, was not so easily forgotten, and the story of Professor Snape in Mrs. Longbottom's dress had spread through the school like wildfire. Harry had managed to talk Dean Thomas out of drawing posters of the incident, luckily for Dean's continued existence, but it hadn't made Professor Snape any less furious about the whole mess.

It was, to an extent, very funny, but the Slytherins had enough self-preservation to keep any signs of amusement, or approval of Professor Lupin, to themselves.

In the library, Roisin threw down her quill and sat back, staring at her almost-finished Ancient Runes Homework. She had hoped to have the week's homework finished before tomorrow's Hogsmeade Weekend, but had hit a stumbling block with Ancient Runes.

They had been given several sets of runes, and asked to translate them. So far, Roisin had identified Nordic, Ogham and Hieroglyphs, but she was stuck on the last set, which looked like Anglo-Saxon, but translated into sljd dfonke asdfhr when translated, so that couldn't be it.

Maybe she was looking at the problem wrong. Professor Babbling had mentioned that one set would be from a work of fiction. The class

as a whole had assumed that she had meant a tale or story written in runes, but perhaps the teacher had been speaking literally. There were many works of fiction that had made up languages, many of them runic.

Roisin doubted that many witches and wizards even knew what a computer was, so that ruled computer- and video-games out. Now Roisin just had to think of authors who had used runes similar to the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet. The only one she could think of was when she had found a copy of the Dwarvish Alphabet when she was ten, after her class had read *The Hobbit*... That was it!

The Hogwarts Library had a small fiction section, with both Muggle and Wizarding literature. Luckily, *The Return of the King*, by J. R. R. Tolkien was still there, and Roisin quickly flipped to the appendixes. Yes! The Dwarven alphabet matched the last set of runes!

Well, there was a future ten points for Slytherin. Now she just had to translate all of them. Hieroglyphics: What can a beautician do for a stern face? Roisin wondered what others would make of that. Maybe a few of them would take the hint about wearing less make-up

Ogham: Trusting men is like trusting water in a sieve. Well, someone was certainly bitter! How certain boys in the class would react, Roisin wasn't sure she wanted to know. She did, however, doubt that it would be positive.

Nordic: The poor worker blames only the tool in his hand. True enough, but how many people would be throwing their books across the room trying to finish this week's homework? It wasn't the books' fault if the students were having trouble, even if they were the 'tools' in question.

Dwarven...Oh, for Morgaine's sake! Education is what you know, not what is in the book. Think outside the box. It looked like the Ancient Runes Professor had a quirky sense of humor. Somehow, Roisin doubted the students would find it anywhere near as funny.

Smiling to herself at the idea of the frustration her Ancient Runes classmates would be going through as they tried to complete the last set, Roisin began to pack up her books. Kneeling to retrieve a dropped quill, she straightened up and nearly fell over again as she came face-to-face with a blonde girl that Roisin could have sworn wasn't there a second ago.

The girl had very long blonde hair, blue eyes that were slightly too big for her face, and an 'off with the fairies' look. Completely unperturbed at the fact that she had nearly given Roisin a heart attack; the girl graced her with a dreamy smile. "Hello, may I join you?"

A quick glance at the girl's robes showed that she was in Ravenclaw, and Roisin tried not to stare at her radish earrings as she gestured for the girl to sit down. "Go ahead. What's your name anyway?"

Another dazed smile. "Luna Lovegood, but everyone calls me 'Loony'. I was going to sit with my housemates, but I was afraid that the Nargles would get us. Perhaps they agreed, because they didn't want me around. The Nargles already took my potions homework, so maybe they're right."

The girl might have been a few raisins short of a fruitcake, but she seemed to grow on you. Besides, if people avoided Luna, then maybe Roisin could get a start on the Animagi book Fionna had sent her. She doubted that Nargles had been behind the homework theft, though. "Do you need help re-writing it?"

Luna shook her head. "No, the Shining Darkings will help me remember it. They don't like Nargles."

Nargles? Shining Darkings? Roisin decided not to think on it too much. Pulling out Animagi: Facts and Fictions, Roisin opened the book and started to read. 'Becoming an Animagus is a long and difficult process. A potion to find your Animagus form, self-transfiguration and complex charms are only the beginning...

Roisin had barely taken two steps into the Slytherin Common Room, when she was accosted by Pansy and Desdemona. "Rosie, you're

back! Blaise was looking for you; said he needed to ask you something.”

Roisin rolled her eyes and managed not to snarl in frustration. “Don’t call me Rosie! Now that you’ve delivered that message, do you know where I might find Blaise?”

Pansy didn’t, but Desdemona claimed that he had been escorting Theo to the Hospital Wing. Two floors up and half way across the castle, Theo said that Blaise had gone to ask Professor Sprout something down at the Greenhouses. Abandoning him to Madam Pomfrey’s tender mercies, Roisin set off again.

Her search led her from the greenhouses, to an empty classroom frequently used for study groups, to the kitchens, where she spent six minutes fending off overly-helpful House elves trying to feed her, and eventually convinced them to tell her where Blaise was. After wailing about how wonderful she was to ask for their help, they pin-pointed Blaise in the Slytherin Boys Dorm.

Growling under her breath, Roisin headed back down another four levels to the Dungeons. Whatever Blaise wanted to talk to her about, it had better be damned good!

Roisin’s eyes lit up as Blaise handed her a wrapped package, opening it to reveal a skin tight vest and leggings in a dark green colour. It reminded her of the outfits of Nadrak women in the Belgariad. (Dudley’s required summer reading, much to Vernon and Petunia’s displeasure. Roisin had been far more enthusiastic. Aside from her parents’ dismay, helping her brother with the big words had been the closest thing to a ‘Twin Moment’ that Roisin and Dudley had had in years.)

Before she could say anything, or ask what it was for, Blaise started to explain. “When I went down to the Chamber of Secrets last year, there was a giant Basilisk skin lying around. I brought as much as I could back with me and had it made into a few dueling outfits. Thought you could use it if you get dragged into any more of your cousin’s crazy adventures.”

For several seconds, Roisin could do not more than open and close her mouth. The vest on its own was probably enough to buy at least a portion of Hogwarts! Words failing her completely, she threw her arms around Blaise and kissed him on the cheek. The Italian boy blushed. "There's a matching coat, too. It's lined with silk for comfort, and it's all self-sizing, so you don't have to worry about growing out of it, either."

Roisin blinked. Basilisk hide was even tougher than Dragon hide, and just as spell-resistant, but sizing charms worked on it? So that was why Sorcha always went for over-powered household charms in a fight. "Thank you, Blaise. This is the most amazing present I have ever received. Clothing charms work on this?"

Blaise grinned at her, relaxing slightly. "Yeah. It can block an Unforgivable, but can't resist a dying spell or a seamstress's basic charms. Irony, isn't it?"

Roisin burst out laughing at his wicked smirk. "Very. Thank you so much."

Blaise suddenly became very interested in his hands. "Listen, Rose, you don't have to feel obligated or anything, but will you go to Hogsmeade with me?"

Roisin blinked, not catching the last part. "Run that by me again, please. A little slower, this time."

Blaise took a deep breath. "Do you want to go to Hogsmeade with me? As potentially more than friends?"

Roisin's brain shut down for a few seconds, then she jumped up and started doing a Happy-Dance as it processed the request. "I'd love to."

Another quick peck on the cheek and Roisin rushed off to try the clothing on, leaving a stunned classmate behind her.

Locking everyone else out of the dorm while she changed and preened in front of the mirror was not among Roisin's best ideas, as it

resulted in a barrage of questions from the other, highly annoyed, Third-Year girls when they finally got back in.

Attempting to escape them by going for an early dinner was a better idea, but managed to backfire spectacularly when Roisin encountered Cormac McLaggan, who cornered her to ask for a Hogsmeade date. Given the Fourth-Year's reputation as a conceited prat who would do anything on a dare, such as ask out a Slytherin, Roisin took the request with a large pinch of salt and turned him down.

The more-annoying-than-usual Gryffindor's reputation as being unable to take no for an answer also seemed to be well-deserved. "Aw, come on, O'Conner. It's not like anyone else has asked you out."

Someone really needed to sit this boy down and work on his pick up lines. Telling a girl that she had no other options was not a good way to try and score a date. Hands on her hips, Roisin glared at him. "I'm going with Blaise, as a matter of fact, and even if I wasn't, I'd date the Whomping Willow before I went out with you!"

It said a lot that Cormac was unable to recognize the ultimate gesture of feminine annoyance. Or maybe he just didn't care. "Black Widow Zabini's kid? Please, you can do better than that!" Roisin was about to let the idiot off with a slap before she walked away, until she heard his next comment. "Plus, dating the Whomping Willow isn't half as good as the dare of a Gryffindor dating a Slytherin."

Well, it looked like her instincts about McLaggan asking her out had been correct. Bastard. Viciously suppressing the desire to hex him six ways from Christmas, Roisin contented herself with slapping him and stalking off, pushing her way through the gathering crowd. Taking a roundabout way back to the Common Room, which was mercifully empty, Roisin called for a house elf to bring her a plate, grabbed her Arithmancy text and spent the next hour in front of the fire.

Arithmancy took up so much concentration and brainpower that there was really none left for fuming over egotistical gits, after all.

Roisin had always been faintly concerned about Desdemona's sanity, but she had credited her other dorm mates with a bit more self control.

It had started with Millicent asking why she was so worried about her outfit for the Hogsmeade weekend, and then the whole room burst into excited squeals when Roisin had mentioned visiting the Three Broomsticks with Blaise. Desdemona practically dived at Roisin's wardrobe, and started comparing with what she had in hers.

The next thing Roisin knew, she was standing in the middle of the room while Pansy and Millicent emptied their wardrobes as well, trying to mix-and-match the 'perfect first-date outfit'. The fact that Pansy was smaller than Roisin, Millicent larger, and Desdemona the wrong shape had obviously slipped their minds.

Desdemona looked up from where she was comparing two different skirts. "Millie, what shade of green did Theo say Blaise was wearing?"

Millicent shrugged (Roisin knew for a fact that Theo refused to discuss the subject of clothing, considering it 'girlish idiocy', so how would anyone, let alone Millicent, know his opinion?) while Pansy giggled at the question. "Theo is a boy, Desdemona. Boys do not notice shades. The best description you'll ever get is the equivalent colour in an eight-box of crayons."

This sparked even more frantic rummaging, and Roisin spent a few minutes simply staring at her friends before ignoring them completely and deciding on a knee-length dress of spring green, the hem, neck, and waist-line trimmed with a darker green, tall black boots, and her new Basilisk-skin coat. She wanted to look nice, but didn't want to over-do it, especially on a first date. Giving the growing mess – and three frantic teenage girls - in the dorm a last, bemused, glance, Roisin managed to sneak out without being noticed.

The Three Broomsticks was too casual for a first date, while Blaise and Roisin had taken one look at the pink hearts and cherubs in Madam Puddifoot's, and walked back out again, suffering from Gilderoy Lockhart flashbacks.

Ten minutes later, they wound up at the Rendezvous, Hogsmeade's answer to hole-in-the-wall cafés. Ordering a snack-platter and two butterbeers, Blaise and Roisin spent the first few minutes in an awkward discussion about the weather before Roisin decided that enough was enough. She had no problem talking with Blaise normally; why should they suddenly be tongue-tied just because it was a date?

This resolution in mind, Roisin commented on the recent victories of the Wimbourne Wasps Quidditch team as a conversation starter. While Blaise was not quite the Quidditch fanatic that some of their friends were, he was an Appleby Arrows supporter, and would cheerfully debate the infamous rivalry to the end of time. A Kenmare Kestrels fan, Roisin cared little either way, but the conversation turned from there to sarcastic remarks about Hogwarts teams and Fanatical captains, to everything else.

After the café, Roisin and Blaise visited Honeydukes, the sweetshop. Trying to ignore Hermione Granger backing away from Ron Weasley as he tried to convince her to try a Fizzing Whizbee ("Do you know what's in those!"), they spent a few minutes browsing, and then left when a crowd of older students crammed in.

There was only an hour or so left before they would have to return to Hogwarts. Wandering up High Street, hand in hand with Blaise, Roisin couldn't help but think that she would remember this for a long time. Perhaps next Hogsmeade Weekend, she could ask Blaise to the Three Broomsticks...

Avoiding her Dorm mates' questions about what had happened on the date with Blaise was nearly as much fun as the date itself.

It was easy to escape interrogation during the Halloween Feast, but not so simple when they returned to the Slytherin Common Room. When Desdemona started banging on the Bathroom door while Roisin was trying to shower, however, the entertainment factor vanished and Roisin gave in.

Detailed questioning continued late into the night, and it was well past eleven when the quiet of Slytherin House was broken by a blaring

alarm. Stumbling down to the Common Room, they hurried over to where Professor Snape was waiting, looking unusually grim.

Glancing around with a brief head-count, the Head of House spoke. "There is no time to lose. Sirius Black has managed to bypass the wards and enter Hogwarts. You will join the other students in the Great Hall while the Professors conduct a search of the Castle."

The Slytherins were quiet, but exchanged nervous glances with each other, huddling in groups as they left the dungeons and made their way to the Great Hall, where the rest of the students were gathered.

hp

hp

hp

hp

A/N: Yes, I know it's been forever since I updated anything, but between looking for work, writer's block and occasional inspiration at three a.m. when I'm too tired to even pick up a pen, let alone write, it's been difficult.

A/N: I received a slightly hostile review for the previous chapter, but it did raise some common concerns, so I've decided to address it here.

I like your story, although I do have some problems with it, particularly the generally positive depiction of Malfoy. His character is intended to be subhuman filth. The type of weak and pathetic opponent that Harry can easily beat on a regular basis.

I'm not sure that I'd go so far as 'sub-human filth', but keep in mind that the Draco we see in the books is from Harry's POV, and they are enemies. I'm not turning him into a fluffy, muggle-loving bunny, but Draco does have friends, and Crabbe and Goyle could have squashed him long ago if he was too insufferable, so he can't be completely horrible.

Please drop the animagus idea; it will turn your OC into an uber character, removing any doubt of her being a Mary-Sue.

As I stated earlier, there are at least four unregistered Animagi, three of whom achieved it at the age of fifteen. Roisin and co will not become Animagi overnight, and at the moment it's only a potential future project. 'Becoming-an-Animagus' is a very frequent plot device, but not an automatic Mary-Sue. On a related note, where else does it need de-Mary-Sue-ing?

Also, when you get to pairings, please don't stick Harry with the groupie **.

Harry is unlikely to end up with Ginny, if that's what the reviewer meant. If they were talking about Roisin, I have already pointed out multiple times that Roisin is Harry's immediate cousin. I do not write incest, which to me is any two people related within two generations of each other.

That said, Constructive Criticism is very much appreciated, but flames are laughed at. Questions, praise, distain or comments, take five seconds to tell me in a review. Do everyone a favor and spend an extra three seconds avoiding 'netspeak'. If it isn't allowed in posted fics, it shouldn't be necessary in reviews.

Thanks,
Nat

Chapter Eight

The students of Hogwarts were gathered in the Great Hall, three quarters of them looking sleepy and very confused, but with the Gryffindors wide awake and active enough to strain already tight nerves.

Leaning on Millicent's shoulder, Roisin was starting to doze off again when Dumbledore stood up, calling for attention. "The teachers and I must conduct a thorough search of the castle. I am afraid that, for your own safety, you will have to spend the night here. I want the Prefects standing guard over the entrances to the hall, and I am leaving the Head Boy and Girl in charge. Any disturbances should be reported immediately; send word with one of the ghosts."

Dumbledore waved his wand casually as he followed the other teachers out of the door. Several of the taller students ducked as the House Tables flew overhead, standing at the edge of the Hall, and the floor was suddenly covered with large, purple sleeping bags. Wishing them all a good rest (as if!), Dumbledore closed the door behind him.

The Great Hall instantly began buzzing with talk as the Gryffindors started telling everyone what had happened, ignoring Percy Weasley as he ordered everyone into their sleeping bags. Having already heard the cliff-notes version from the twins, Roisin drifted over to They-Who-Knew-All, occasionally known as Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil.

Despite popular opinion, the two girls did make sure that they had their facts as straight as possible before they started telling people, who, in turn, began exaggerating things. Given their cultured reputation as gossiping airheads, Roisin often wondered how they had avoided going to Slytherin, and supposed that the Sorting Hat must have wanted to spare the rest of the House.

Getting confirmation and a few more details from Parvati, Roisin went back to where the rest of her year mates were, filling them in as she

set up her sleeping bag. Settling in for a long night, Roisin smirked and put up a low-level barrier as the candles promptly extinguished.

Those who had been too busy talking to get into their own were now stuck fumbling around in the dark, resulting in several non-magical curses as people tried to get into their own sleeping bags without falling or tripping over somebody else. Attempting to find a comfortable position on the cold, stone floor, Roisin cast a mild Drowsiness Charm on herself, swiftly falling asleep.

Hogwarts spent the next few days awash with speculation on how Black had managed to get into the castle, ranging from being able to turn himself into a flowering shrub (Hannah Abbot of Hufflepuff), to Apparation or a Broomstick, to some physical disguise. Most of the more common ones were shot down by Hermione, accompanied by rhetoric demands of if she was the only person to have read Hogwarts, a History, which she probably was.

Roisin was more inclined toward Luna's quiet theory that he had snuck in by transfiguring himself into a flea on a rat, though perhaps with a few adjustments to the idea. After all, Roisin doubted that a natural rat, unless it was registered as a student's pet, would have made it through the anti-vermin charms, and wondered how a flea could hold a wand to transfigure himself back into a human.

Unfortunately, very few people took the young Ravenclaw at all seriously, and that theory was dismissed with a few jokes about how they were looking for Sirius Black, rather than the Black Plague.

Thankfully, the speculation died down after a week or two, along with the good weather, and Roisin tried to focus on keeping ahead in her schoolwork. Arithmancy was going well, but Ancient Runes was quickly becoming Roisin's favorite, only partially because it was her place to shine.

Roisin had received twenty points for correctly deciphering all of the rune sets, along with a barrage of questions from fellow students as to how the heck she had figured it out, and a frosty silence from Hermione and the two unknown Ravenclaws. To everyone's surprise,

those three had not been able to figure the last set of runes out, and were taking it personally.

For all her intelligence, and being a muggleborn, Gryffindor's resident brainiac was too focused on academic sources, giving little faith or attention to anything that had not been verified by at least three qualified historians/specialists/researchers, making it difficult to trust anything 'unproven', or to think outside the box.

Irate classmates, however, also quickly fell to the background as the first game of the Quidditch Season approached. Originally, it was supposed to be Slytherin vs. Gryffindor, a game that would have started the season off with a bang (and several injuries).

Fortunately or unfortunately, however, the steadily worsening weather had prompted Flint to use Draco's "Injured Arm" as an excuse and switch with Hufflepuff. Roisin rarely paid that much attention to Quidditch, but it was hard to miss Flint and Draco's gloating, or Oliver Wood's outraged shouting when he found out.

Tuning both captains out, Roisin decided to let the rest of the school worry about Quidditch, and she would worry about how to get to a book about the Animagi revealing potion. The book in question had recently been moved to the restricted section of the Library, and was therefore largely inaccessible.

Roisin managed to get a note signed with help from Luna, in exchange for taking out a three-year-subscription to the Quibbler, a lesser-known paper run by Luna's Father. Despite her occasional oddities, Luna was a favorite of Professor Flitwick, so when she said she needed the book for a Quibbler article; he signed the note with a smile of amused tolerance.

It was almost like having a little sister, at times, and with the way her housemates treated her, it seemed like Luna could use a friend. Roisin was seriously considering the possibility of adopting Luna as an honorary Slytherin. The enigmatic blonde was unafraid of being herself, scarily intelligent, and really quite enjoyable to be around.

The Friday before the first Quidditch match, Roisin was late to Defense Against the Dark Arts, having stopped to hex a group of Ravenclaws who were bullying Luna (hopefully they enjoyed being turned into Luna's description of a Blibbering Humdinger) and help the girl retrieve her scattered belongings.

Hoping that Professor Lupin was one of the ones who gave chances when you were late, Roisin nearly collided with Harry, who muttered something about obsessed Quidditch Captains as they ran for the classroom, arriving ten minutes late and skidding to a halt as they realized that it was Professor Snape, rather than Lupin, who stood at the front of the room.

Knowing for a fact that she would not be in trouble when Professor Snape was teaching, Roisin slid into a seat next to Desdemona just in time to hear Professor Snape take ten points from Gryffindor, as predicted by just about everyone in the class, before starting the lesson. "As I was saying before Potter interrupted, Professor Lupin has left no record of the topics you have covered so far –"

To her misfortune and everyone else's resignation, Hermione interrupted. "Please, sir, we've covered Boggarts, Red Caps, Kappas and Grindylows."

There were few things that Professor Snape hated more than being interrupted, as Hermione should have learned after over two years under his instruction. "Be quiet, I did not ask for information. I was merely commenting on Professor Lupin's lack of organization."

While this was being unfair to Professor Lupin, and even the Slytherins were forced to admit it, Roisin knew that protesting out loud would be counter-productive. She also knew that Dean Thomas was likewise aware, though he chose to respond anyway. "He's the best Defense Professor we've ever had!"

Although this was not saying much, as Professor Lupin's predecessors were Quirrel and Lockhart, a murmur of agreement rippled through the class, even from the Slytherins. Professor Snape did not look pleased. "You are easily satisfied. I would expect First Years to be

able to deal with Red Caps and Grindylows. Today we shall discuss Werewolves.”

Roisin wondered about Professor Snape’s choice, as the Werewolf chapter was near the back of the book, and due to be covered shortly before the end-of-year tests, rather than a few months into the School Year. Roisin raised her hand to quietly point this out, bracing herself for detention, but was forestalled by Hermione. “But sir, we’re not supposed to do Werewolves yet. We’re due to start Hinkypunks –“

Roisin swiftly lowered her hand in self-preservation when Professor Snape’s tone turned to one of deadly calm. “Miss Granger, I was under the impression that I was taking this class, not you. I am telling you to turn to page three hundred and ninety-four.” The Slytherins and one or two Gryffindors obeyed, causing Professor Snape to snap, “All of you. Now!”

With several bitter, sidelong looks and not a little muttering, as even the Slytherins knew that their lack of foreknowledge would result in being shown up by Hermione, the class opened their books. Professor Snape began to prowl the room, as he did in Potions. “Which of you can tell me how to distinguish between a Werewolf and a true wolf?”

Roisin tried to remember what she had heard about Werewolves from listening to a few Fourth Years doing their homework. The differences had to do with the snout, pupils and tail... As the rest of the class wracked their brains, Hermione’s hand was, predictably, the first in the air.

For unknown reasons, Professor Snape ignored it, focusing on the rest of the class. “Anyone? Are you telling me that Professor Lupin has not even taught you the basic distinction –“

The pupils of a Werewolf were red, as opposed to the gold of a real wolf! Roisin lifted her hand to point this out, but Parvati Patil interrupted before Professor Snape could call on her. “We told you, we haven’t got as far as Werewolves yet! We’re due to start...”

“Silence!” Professor Snape almost hissed, “Well, well, well, I never thought I’d meet a Third Year class that couldn’t recognize a Werewolf when they saw one. I shall be informing Professor Dumbledore how very behind you all are. Did you have a question, Miss O’Conner?”

Roisin wondered if now was the best time to speak, as Professor Snape seemed to be counting on them not knowing about Werewolves, and would probably get nasty if she contradicted this. Still, her hand was up, and she could hardly back out after being called on. “A true wolf has golden eyes, while a werewolf has red pupils. Um,”

Roisin tried to remember more details, turning up blank, but as Roisin had not been scolded for replying, Hermione decided to try again. “Please, sir, the Werewolf differs from the true wolf in several small ways. The snout of a werewolf...”

It seemed that Professor Snape’s notorious short temper had taken enough interruptions. “This is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger. Five more points from Gryffindor, for being an insufferable Know-it-all.”

Roisin thought this was rather unfair, especially as he had said nothing to Roisin, for which she was thankful. She sent Hermione a sympathetic look as the Gryffindor went very red and stared at the floor, tears in her eyes and hands in her lap. Blaise and the other Slytherin girls looked uncomfortable.

The Gryffindors all glared at Professor Snape, obviously feeling that this was going a bit far, even though all of them had called Hermione a Know-it-all at least once. Ron Weasley was more vocal in his protests. “You asked us a question and she knows the answer! Why ask if you don’t want to be told?”

The entire class winced in unison as Professor Snape advanced on the Redhead. “Detention, Weasley. And if I ever hear you criticize the way I teach a class again, you will be very, very sorry.”

Although there was often something to criticize, the class knew that now was most certainly not the time. The rest of the lesson was spent in silence, as they read the chapter and took notes, while Professor Snape commented on their previous work, making derogatory remarks.

Roisin had to bite her tongue when he looked over one of her previous essays and claimed that it barely deserved three out of ten, rather than the eight it had been marked. Further, he claimed that the Kappa was more commonly found in Mongolia, rather than Japan, with Korea a moderately close second.

Given that all sources named the Kappa as a Japanese water-demon, that almost all studies of Kappas took place in Japan, and that the water that gave the Kappa its strength was supposedly from the lakes sacred to the Shintō Religion, Roisin found this blatantly unfair.

When the bell finally rang, the class was held back long enough to be assigned an essay on Werewolves, consisting of two rolls of parchment on how to recognize and kill them, due on Monday. Given that Roisin was already near to tears from Professor Snape's comment, usually reserved for Gryffindors, this was the last thing she needed.

The standard roll of parchment was 6.5 feet long, and most school essays ranged from one to five feet in length, depending on the class and what was being covered. Thirteen feet of parchment in three days, especially when one of those days was a Quidditch Match, was impossible for even the Slytherins to claim as fair.

Out of earshot, Slytherin and Gryffindor alike burst into protest about the homework. Sneaking off to the side to avoid the questioning looks that people had been sneaking her for most of the lesson, Roisin burst into tears and decided to skip History of Magic to hide in the library, where Luna usually spent her free period.

Roisin liked her Year Mates, but they were as confused as she was, and weren't really the sort to sit and listen to a problem. Luna knew all about unfair treatment and would hopefully be the listening ear that Roisin desperately needed right now.

The next day started with Roisin in a foul mood. Luna had been very comforting about the Defense class fiasco, but the second Roisin walked into the Slytherin Common Room, she was bombarded with questions or jeers on what she did to make Professor Snape treat her like that.

Fed up, Roisin had stalked straight back out and spent the night in the library, intent on spending the night there. If Professor Snape was going to falsely accuse her of shoddy work, then he could find something wrong while reading through thirteen feet of top grade homework in the most obscure wording she could find! If she had to write it, then he damn well had to read it!

Unfortunately, a library table did not make for a good night's sleep, which, in turn, made for a cranky Roisin the next morning. Regally Ignoring her House Mates, Roisin cast water-repelling charms on everything she wore, as the outside weather was worse than ever, and sat with Luna at the Ravenclaw table, spending the morning in a cheerful debate over the possible habitat of Crumple-Horned Snorkacks.

Eventually running out to the Quidditch stands, which were a lot emptier than usual, Roisin joined the Ravenclaws, all of whom were busy casting water-repelling charms on themselves and on large sheets, which were then levitated above the stands as a makeshift shelter.

The Quidditch game continued for several hours, but even this did not generate the usual excitement, as the spectators could barely see the game in the first place. Just as the students around her were starting to whisper about going back inside, Roisin suddenly felt a cold chill that had nothing to do with the rain, and faint sounds that sounded very much like her parents calling her a freak.

Roisin swore loudly, glancing at Luna, who looked both scared and tearful as she whispered something that sounded like 'Mummy'. Nearby, a few older students had managed to produce silvery mist, some in vague outlines, and had taken a stand in front of the other students.

Roisin's attention, however, was quickly drawn elsewhere, specifically at her cousin, who was plummeting from what looked like fifty or sixty feet in the air. There was a spell for slowing things down, but what was it! In the teacher's stand, Professor Dumbledore stood up, shooting a spell that seemed to cushion Harry, though it didn't stop him completely, followed by a spell that looked very much like the one the Ravensclaws were producing, but much more solid.

The Dementors backed away, and Roisin followed most of the rest of the school back inside, pulling Luna with her.

Leaving Luna in the Ravenclaw Second Year Dorms and promising to come back as soon as possible, Roisin had run to the Dorms to change into something dry, then run straight back out and toward the hospital wing.

Half-way there, she collided with a tall, brown-haired young man in Hufflepuff Quidditch robes, who reached out and steadied her. Regaining her balance, she nodded at the Hufflepuff. "Thanks. Cedric, right?"

Cedric Diggory nodded in return. "And you're Roisin O'Conner, Harry Potter's cousin. Hey, if you're on your way to the hospital wing, can you tell him I hope he recovers soon?"

Roisin lifted an eyebrow. "Of course, but out of sheer curiosity, is there a reason you can't tell him yourself?"

Cedric grinned, and Roisin saw why the older girls kept discreetly swooning over him, despite being a Hufflepuff. "I went up to try, but the Weasley twins glared me back out. I didn't want to be on the receiving end of a Weasley prank spree, so I figured I'd come back later."

Roisin smiled in amusement, understanding completely. There was an ongoing and very close debate about whether or not a Weasley Twin prank spree was worse than detention in the forbidden forest. Regardless, no sane person wanted to be on the receiving end.

Bidding goodbye to Cedric, Roisin arrived at the Hospital Wing just as Harry was regaining consciousness. He bolted upright with far too much energy for someone who had just fallen off his broom. "What happened?"

Everyone jumped back in surprise. Fred (or possibly George) Weasley recovered first, "You fell off. Must have been – what – fifty feet?"

Alicia Spinnet, who was shivering from either cold, or nerves, or possibly both, agreed with the twin. "We thought you'd died."

Hermione, whose eyes were very bloodshot with worry, made a small, squeaky noise as she nodded her head.

Roisin closed her eyes in resignation as Harry sounded completely unconcerned about the near-death experience. Then again, he was probably getting used to them. "But the match. What happened, are we having a replay?"

The Gryffindor team squirmed, avoiding his eyes, and Harry looked like the world had ended. "We didn't – lose?"

Roisin rolled her eyes at him, as the twin who hadn't yet spoken continued the explanation. "Diggory got the snitch, just after you fell. He didn't realize what had happened. When he looked back and saw you on the ground, he tried to call it off. Wanted a re-match."

Roisin thought that this was a good time to interject. "He came by while you were unconscious, too. Said he hoped you recovered soon."

The Weasley twins shot her an evil look and continued as if Roisin had not spoken. Quidditch obsessed idiots. "Hufflepuff won fair and square, though. Even Wood admits it."

Actually, Wood was nowhere to be seen, which was surprising. Harry came to the same conclusion. "Where is he, anyway?"

The first twin answered, looking almost sympathetic. “Still in the showers – we think he’s trying to drown himself.”

Harry buried his head in his knees, looking even more depressed than before. The Weasley Twin shook his shoulder roughly. “C’mon, Harry, it’s not like you’ve never missed a snitch before.”

The second twin agreed. “Yeah, there had to be one time you didn’t catch it.”

The first twin took up the encouragement. “It’s not over yet. We lost by a hundred points, right? So if Hufflepuff lose to Ravenclaw and we beat Ravenclaw and Slytherin...”

The second twin continued, disagreeing. “Hufflepuff will have to lose by at least two hundred points.”

The chasers joined in the debate, leaving Harry to himself. Roisin joined Ron and Hermione, sitting in silence at Harry’s side. After about ten minutes, Madam Pomfrey swooped over and threw the team out. Roisin followed, heading down to the Ravenclaw Common Room.

The bronze knocker that guarded the Ravenclaw Common Room must not have been in top form, as the question to get inside was the egg riddle from the Hobbit. Walking in, Roisin found the Common Room largely deserted, except for a few huddled groups, probably discussing the Dementors appearing on school grounds, and Luna, curled up next to the fireplace.

Walking over quietly, Roisin sat down next to her younger friend. “Are you feeling any better?”

Luna shook her head, looking strangely vulnerable. “I’m still scared. The Dementors came close, and I heard my mother. I know I’ll see her again, but I miss her so much. I don’t want to talk about it.”

Her arm still around the younger girl, Roisin looked at her seriously, knowing that this was not the time to pry. “You can trust me, you know. Slytherin has a bad reputation, but not all of us are blood-

obsessed gits. I won't force you to tell me anything, but I'll listen if you need to talk about it."

Luna smiled slightly. "I know, and thank you." They spotted another Ravenclaw trying to eavesdrop, and Roisin swiftly adopted an expression of amused tolerance as Luna continued in a louder voice, "It's the Snorkacks, you see..."

The Ravenclaw rolled his eyes and walked off, probably to tell his friends that it was just Luna being her usual odd self.

Roisin continued to sit with Luna, enjoying a comforting silence, until Professor Flitwick showed up to take them all to dinner, saying that they needed to eat after the incident with the Dementors.

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A/N: Yes, it's been forever, I know. Looking for work, an original novel, and a massive case of writers block is the only excuse I can offer. Hopefully the people reading this haven't given up on me completely. I'm not sure how long it will be before the next chapter, but hopefully it won't be a four-month gap.

A.N: Someone mentioned that they wished for more deviation from Canon. This is a slow development, but will become increasingly obvious in later chapters. Be patient.

Reviews are very welcome. *hint, hint*

Thanks,

Nat

Chapter Nine

Roisin visited Harry, who was still confined to the hospital wing, twice more over the weekend, one time running into Cedric Diggory, who had visited again after the Weasley Twins had left, and was actually in the middle of a civil conversation with Harry.

From what Roisin could pick up, they were trying to piece together a run-down of the full Quidditch game, given that no-one had been able to see more than a few feet in front of their own noses. Stifling a giggle, Roisin left the hospital wing, delivering a necklace with a single butterbeer cork from Luna, which the younger girl claimed would repel Nargles.

Precisely what Nargles were was beyond Roisin, but as Harry said, looking slightly dubious, it was the thought that counted.

All in all, it was a relief when Monday came.

Roisin was back on speaking terms with most of her year, once they had apologized for the teasing after Defense Against the Dark Arts, with the exception of Draco, Pansy, Crabbe and Goyle.

Draco had finally cast off his bandages from the Hippogryff, and was celebrating his new freedom by doing impersonations of Harry falling off his broom. Roisin, who had not found it nearly as amusing, took every opportunity to glare and tell him to shut up.

They were currently in Potions, and Draco took advantage of Professor Snape's distraction to start yet another performance. Gripping her knife very obviously, Roisin turned toward the blond, who froze mid-faint, but she had barely opened her mouth before being hit on the back of the head by something.

Blaise, working beside her, picked it up and placed it on the workbench, revealing it to be a crocodile heart. A literally bleeding heart had hit her on the head! Furious, she whirled around, spotting the culprit as Ron Weasley turned very pale.

Slime and blood dripping from her hair and Robes, Roisin was about to respond in a particularly nasty way, (she wasn't sure how, but it would not be in any way pleasant) but Professor Snape got there first, taking fifty points from Gryffindor.

Roisin was excused from the rest of the Potions lesson to go and clean up. Three showers and a change of robes later, Roisin was running toward the Defense Classroom, cursing the distance between classes. Oddly, or perhaps not so, most of the class was clustered outside the door, despite the first bell having already rung.

Slowing down slightly and trying to twist her damp hair into a semblance of order, she approached the crowd just in time to hear Ron speaking to Harry. "If Snape's taking Defense Against the Dark Arts again, I'm going off sick. Check who's there, Hermione."

Roisin knew that skiving off would be a bad idea, but privately agreed that she wasn't looking forward to a repeat of Professor Snape's last Defense Against the Dark Arts class. Luckily for all concerned, Professor Lupin seemed to have recovered, though he still looked unwell, and was promptly bombarded with protests about last week's homework.

"It's not fair! He was only filling in; why should he give us homework?"

"We don't know anything about Werewolves!"

"– Two rolls of Parchment!"

Professor Lupin frowned, seeming to agree with the students, at least partially. "Did you tell Professor Snape that we hadn't covered them yet?"

This prompted yet another round of everyone trying to talk over each other. As if that hadn't been the first thing they had tried! "Yes, but he said that we were really behind."

"He wouldn't listen – "

“– two rolls of Parchment!

Finally, Professor Lupin smiled at the expressions of indignation. “Don’t worry; I shall speak to Professor Snape about the homework. You don’t have to do the essay.”

That was certainly a relief. Roisin had started it, writing down everything she could find, but had only managed to fill two thirds of a roll of parchment. Hermione, of course, instantly protested that she had already finished it. More than one person, from both Houses, rolled their eyes.

Finally, everyone settled down, and they started the lesson. Professor Lupin produced a large glass box, containing what appeared to be wisps of smoke forming a frail and harmless-looking little creature with one leg, and who looked to be holding a tiny lantern.

In case Professor Snape ever took the class again, Roisin was not going to give him any chance to criticize again, taking detailed notes on Professor Lupin’s lecture. “The Hinkypunk lures travelers into the bog. You see the lantern dangling from its hand? People follow the lights as the Hinkypunk hops ahead, and then –“

The Hinkypunk made a horrible, squelching noise against the glass, which left everyone in very little doubt as to the general, but probably ominous fate of said innocent traveler. Ick.

Professor Lupin called for Harry to stay back at the end of class, but Roisin thought little of it; all the teachers had been acting strangely of late, at least as far as Harry was concerned. Meanwhile, Roisin had her own problems. Desdemona had suggested trying to become Animagi, and the rest of the year had enthusiastically agreed, but so far, Roisin seemed to be the only one doing any work on the subject. Either that would change, or the rest of them could become Animagi on their own time, without help from Roisin.

Over the summer, Aunt Marge had attempted some ‘Bonding Time’ with Roisin. In order to make the incident slightly less torturous, Roisin had directed the subject toward breeding and asked if she

could buy a notebook to write things down. As a consequence, Roisin had spent three hours drawing random patterns in a muggle notebook, while trying to keep an attentive expression plastered on her face.

As usual, Aunt Marge had gone overboard with buying things for Roisin, but the 5-subject spiral notebooks proved very useful in keeping track of her Ancient Runes and Arithmancy notes, rather than rifling through countless rolls of parchment.

Better still, none of her House mates would go near such obviously Muggle things (although Blaise and Desdemona were slightly better at judging things on merit over origins), making the notebooks perfect for hiding the Animagi research.

Opening Fionna's copy of *Moste Potente Potions*, Roisin flipped to a clean page in her notebook and began taking down the ingredients for the Animagus potion. Some could be easily found in the Student Storeroom, but others, such as the diluted Erumpent fluid would have to be owled in. There was a Hogsmeade visit near the end of term, and she could visit the potions shop there, or convince Fionna to take her shopping over the Christmas Holidays.

Given the probable cost of the ingredients, Roisin had an idea of another reason not all wizards tried to become Animagi. Vernon and Petunia had found it hard to shop for Roisin as a child, and compensated by giving her money to buy her own gifts. Over 11 years, this added up to a lot, which was currently stored in a muggle bank account. Even if she converted it to galleons, however, the cost of the ingredients would still make a significant dent.

Roisin's calculations of how much she had in muggle money converted to galleons, given the current exchange rate and minus the conversion fee was interrupted by Millicent entering the dorm. "Hi, Roisin. Oh, are you working on the Animagus Project? Can I see?"

Roisin snapped her notebook closed. "Yes, I am working on the Animagus Project, and no, you can't look. If I'm going to be the only one working on the project, then I'm going to be the only one reaping the benefits."

Millicent opened her mouth to refute the statement, closed it again, and was about to speak when she was interrupted by Pansy and Desdemona. "What's going on, and why is Roisin wearing her 'Stubborn-Determination' look?"

Roisin maintained an icy silence, so Millicent took it on herself to explain. "Roisin was working on the Animagus Project, but says that since none of us have been helping, she isn't going to show us her notes."

Pansy looked indignant. "We've been helping!" Roisin raised a disbelieving eyebrow. "Sort of." Roisin's other eyebrow joined the first. "A bit." Roisin folded her arms. "OK, fine, we've been letting you do everything. But we can change that, if you let us look at the notes."

Roisin's arms remained folded. "I wasn't put in Slytherin because I look good in green, you know. You'll see my notes if and when I see some productive input from all of you, and not before. That goes for they boys as well, and you can tell them I said that!"

Grabbing her Arithmancy and Ancient Runes notes and textbooks, along with the Animagus notebook, Roisin stalked off to the library. A Dramatic Exit would have been useless if she left the Animagus notebook sitting on her bed, after all, and she really did have homework to do.

It was not until the next week that the other Third Year Slytherins sheepishly approached Roisin in the library, where she was teaching Luna a nasty hex to put on her homework binder, guaranteed to keep away everything from Nargles to spiteful room-mates. It was unofficial Slytherin Policy to never be put in a position where you needed to apologize in the first place, so none of them said anything, but opened up their books on Animagi and Advanced Transfiguration.

Guiding Luna through the correct wand movements and demonstrating on her Animagus notebook (Draco smothered a disappointed scowl - that spoiled any plans he had of sneaking a peek), Roisin smirked slightly. It was probably the closest she would get to an apology, but at least the point made it across.

It was the day before the Winter Holidays, and from the number of Second-Year Ravenclaws glaring at her, not to mention Luna's much more cheerful expression, it seemed that Roisin's younger friend had mastered the Alarm Hex. Browsing through the Hogsmeade Bookstore for a book on rare magical creatures as a congratulations/Yule gift for Luna, Roisin didn't see Blaise until she ran into him. "Hey, Rose, everyone's waiting at the Three Broomsticks. Are you coming?"

Yes, she was, but there was still fifteen minutes remaining before they had agreed to meet at noon. "Yes, just let me buy this and I'll be there in a few."

The Three Broomsticks was an excellent place to meet, largely because it was so busy that no one paid attention to what anyone else was doing. Once they were all settled down with mugs of steaming Butterbeer, Draco glanced around to see if anyone was listening and pulled out a list. "One of the steps included in the Animagus Transformation is a potion. Question is: how do we make it? Some of the ingredients look pretty rare."

Rogue sighed as a few people glanced their way in response to Draco's constant looking to make sure no one was paying attention. "Draco, are you trying to look conspicuous? Stop looking around, people are noticing. As to the potion, most of the ingredients are common enough, and your father has contacts in most of the Ministry; I'm sure he can help with the rest. Our real problem is how to brew it without anyone catching on."

Theo nodded in agreement. "There's no way we can do it at Hogwarts. It takes a week of near-constant supervision to brew, and there is no way we'll manage that between classes and curfew, even without Professors and other students around. We'll have to do it over the Holidays at some point."

Blaise was looking over the list of ingredients. "It'll have to be the Easter ones, then. Mum's latest husband can probably get some diluted Erumpent fluid, but it would take at least a week to owl in. The Christmas Holidays are only two weeks."

Roisin nodded, stifling a giggle at Blaise's description of 'latest husband'. "I can get the Augurey feathers and I might be able to talk Harry into getting the tongue from last year's Basilisk. Blaise is right though; even if we do get all of the ingredients, we won't be able to start until Easter."

Millicent shrugged. "That isn't too bad, though. It gives us a chance to do more research, and that potion doesn't look easy, so we'd better practice in order to get it right the first time."

Pansy concurred with the previous opinions. "Well, lets at least visit the potions shop while we're here. We can do inventory on what they do have, what will be in our own standard potions kit and what we need to get ourselves, then make a list of what it will cost."

Roisin had actually brought her previously calculated list, and pulled it out of her bag. "I made the list already. Lacewings, Moonstone, daisy roots and shrivelfig are in our potions kit, we can get the beetle eyes and possibly the hellebore and powdered bezoars at the potions shop, and Blaise and I can get hold of the Erumpent fluid and Augurey feathers. That's a third of the list, and two expensive ingredients taken care of. See what you can get hold of over the holidays, and we'll compare notes when we get back."

Finishing the butterbeer, the small group headed out again, brushing past Professors McGonagall and Hagrid as they left.

The next day seemed to pass in a flash, despite pestering younger relatives running around in a panic and constantly pestering you to help find something that they had forgotten to pack and couldn't find, or the long train ride back to London.

Then, of course, Mary just had to announce that Roisin was dating Blaise, which meant that the next three days were filled with everyone asking questions, and Roisin trying to avoid them.

When you added Yule and Wren Day, and various activities that made people suspicious if you declined, especially given previous obvious enjoyment, it made for a very busy holiday, and it was not

until four days before the beginning of term that Roisin managed to talk Fionna into taking her on a walk to an area where the local flock of Augureys were usually found.

Given that it was almost always raining in Ireland, not to mention their native habitat, Augureys were not hard to find, if slightly difficult to get to and feathers even less so. Roisin did have to dodge a few pointed questions as to why she wanted them, but a few vague implications that she wanted to play a trick on certain classmates by switching their quills with feathers that revealed ink resulted in dropping the subject.

The remaining days were filled with riding, games, and generally having fun, and all too soon, it was time to return to Hogwarts.

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A/N: The next chapter is up, and it only took a bit over a week! The "Pestering younger relatives is a reference to my sister, who always remembers something five seconds before we have to leave. Not much action this time, but this was a bit more of a 'filler' chapter. Hopefully the next one will be up soon.

Reviews are very welcome and (usually) make me write faster! *hint, hint*.

Thanks, Nat.

Disclaimer: I'm getting very tired of writing these, and I'm sure that you're getting very tired of reading them. I do not own Harry Potter.

Summary: See previous chapters.

Chapter Nine

Returning to Hogwarts was normal enough, if you discounted the Dementors and the fact that it was a castle filled with adolescent Witches and Wizards. What was very obviously not normal was the glaring split in the usually-inseparable trio of Harry and Ron, and Hermione.

A few words to Luna, who was much more observant than people gave her credit for, gifted Roisin with the knowledge that it had to do with Hermione's interfering on something that Ron and Harry found unreasonable, and her complete refusal to apologize for not talking to them about it first. The end result was Hermione avoiding the Gryffindor Common Room, Ron acting like she had performed an extreme felony, and Harry refusing to talk to Hermione until she apologized.

That made it a very intriguing puzzle, but Roisin felt that she should probably give them some time to cool down and work it out themselves before she tried to poke her nose in. She still needed to ask Harry about getting the Basilisk tongue, so perhaps she could get more details out of him then.

It was not until Thursday that Roisin managed to catch Harry on the way to lunch and stop him long enough to talk. "Hey, Harry, do you have –." She stopped her request mid-sentence as she saw his face. "What on earth happened? Are you all right?"

Harry sighed, relieved to have someone to talk to that was less likely to result in a lost friendship. "It's a long story, but essentially, I received a Firebolt for Christmas, there was no card and Hermione wound up getting it confiscated by Professor McGonagall. The Professor thinks that the Firebolt was sent by Sirius Black and wants to strip it down to check for curses and such."

Roisin nearly choked. A Firebolt? All right, that was slightly suspicious, but very few people would sign their name to such an expensive gift unless they knew Harry very well, escaped convict or not. How would Black even buy a broomstick in the first place? And stripping down a Firebolt would be something that Ron would consider a felony. Roisin just hoped Oliver Wood didn't find out. "So that's what Luna was talking about. Confiscating a Firebolt sounds a bit extreme, though."

Harry gave her a scandalized look, obviously under the impression that 'extreme' was an understatement. "Yes! I have been taking the whole Sirius Black issue seriously, and we were planning to have Madam Hooch supervise a test flight, just in case, but now I'll be lucky if there's anything left to fly! I know Hermione thinks that she was only looking out for me, but she won't even apologize for not talking to me about it, first! And who's Luna?"

Roisin smiled slightly. "Second Year Ravenclaw who is a lot more observant than people think. The split between the Golden Trio is very out of the ordinary, so I asked her about it. I'm guessing that part of the issue is that she didn't bother to talk to you or get your opinion before running to a Professor?"

Harry nodded. "Yes. I mean, it's a Firebolt, but Hermione is my friend. I'm mainly upset that either she doesn't trust me, or she thinks that I'm incapable of making my own decisions, so she does it for me. Can we change the topic, please?"

Roisin smiled again. "Certainly. Actually, I wanted to ask you a favor. I'm working on an extra-curricular project, or was, until I found out that one of the ingredients was half of a Basilisk tongue. You killed the Basilisk last year, so, technically, you 'have claim over the spoils of your victory'. I can probably go down by myself, with you teaching me Parseltongue, but I sort of need your permission, and I need to offer you something in exchange."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Go ahead, I'm not using the Basilisk remains. You can have the tongue if you tell me the potion."

Drat, he just had to land on the one question she didn't want to answer. Roisin grimaced slightly "It's the Animagus Potion. The whole process isn't that hard, actually, but almost no-one bothers to register with the Ministry."

Harry raised an eyebrow, a small smirk taking the sting out of his joking words. "Why not? Evil Slytherins and nefarious purposes?"

Roisin stuck out her tongue, playfully. "Big words, cousin-mine. More like they didn't see how it was the Ministry's business, or they turned into something embarrassing, and didn't want it on public record. I think Desdemona's Third Cousin, whatever removed turned into a horned slug, or something like that."

Harry snickered. "I'm not going to comment on that. Professor Lupin promised to teach me the Patronus Charm on Thursday at eight, and lessons finish at four. I'll meet you outside Moaning Myrtle's bathroom after class on Thursday, and we can go down then."

Roisin hugged him in delight, forgoing her usual reserve. "That sounds wonderful, and good luck with your Patronus lessons and working things out with Hermione. I'm sure the Firebolt will be back in one piece."

Lessons had started again, and Roisin's Arithmancy class had moved onto the importance of numbers in more complex spell casting. For example, permanent or semi-permanent spells required four small wand movements to cast; four being the number of stability.

Other spells were based on similar reasoning, with most transfiguration required five components (Power, Determination, Intent, Spell and Wand Motion); five being the number of change and instability.

No one particularly felt like trudging outside in the January weather, but at least Care Of Magical Creatures was focused on Salamanders, so they were allowed to stand around a large, warm fire all lesson.

Seamus Finnigan commented that when people were going to dance around the bonfire, they were usually naked, and weren't girls supposed to be wrapped up in tradition? The female portion of the class nearly sent him to the Hospital Wing, but Hagrid intervened.

In Ancient Runes, Professor Babbling had them working on the differences and similarities of different rune sets, and how they changed over time. In any spare time, Roisin also focused on fictional rune languages, as Professor Babbling was fond of throwing such curve balls on occasion, just to see who was paying the closest attention.

Signing your essay in Quenya also tended to earn extra credit, as Roisin had accidentally discovered when fretting over how she had performed on a difficult essay topic. Apparently it showed that you were making an 'extra effort', and therefore deserved extra marks.

All in all, it was a relief when Thursday came and classes finished. Moaning Myrtle's bathroom was not difficult to find, as the ghost in question had no qualms about making herself known. Opening the passage to the Chamber of Secrets was likewise easy, although the idea of sliding down the waste-covered pipes was enough to give anyone pause.

Closing her eyes with a faintly martyred expression, Roisin closed her eyes and slid down, casting several of the strongest cleaning charms she knew the instant she flew out of the other end. Harry followed seconds later, looking only marginally cleaner than she had, and causing Roisin to cast several of the same spells on him before they continued onward.

Walking over the animal skeletons that seemed to cover every inch of the floor was not a pleasant experience, nor was trying to crawl through the small opening between a rockslide that blocked the passage at one point. When they reached the actual chamber, and Roisin saw the body of the dead Basilisk, her legs failed her and she sat down hard. "You actually fought that thing? It's got to be thirty feet long!"

Harry looked faintly embarrassed. "Yeah, I was a bit busy trying to stay alive to measure it, last time. I don't suppose you know how to harvest Basilisk parts, because I have no clue."

A few weeks before the end of last term, Professor Snape had received a shipment of poisonous snakes, unfortunately still alive. Upon the discovery that Blaise and Roisin were learning to speak Parseltongue, he had dragooned them into helping him milk the snakes, before turning them into potions ingredients.

As a result, Roisin knew a lot about harvesting snake parts, and took out her dragon-hide gloves, several tools and a specially prepared jar, enchanted for durability, preservation, and everything else the Third-Year Slytherins could think of. Luckily, Roisin only needed half of the tongue, so crawling inside the beast's mouth was un-necessary.

Not knowing how much time they had left before they would be missed, the task was quickly finished, and they made their way back to the pipe, where Harry stopped, having just thought of a problem. "Last time, we had Fawkes to carry us to the Bathroom. Since we forgot to bring a phoenix, I don't suppose you have any ideas about how we get back up?"

As a matter of fact, Roisin did have an idea. Rolling her eyes and giving Harry a faintly patronizing look, Roisin pointed her wand at her feet. "Gryffindors. Wingardium Leviosa!"

Roisin levitated into the air, smiling at Harry, who was clearly questioning why he hadn't thought of that. Casting a low-level protective charm and pulling out two large fans that she had brought with her, Roisin tossed one to Harry and began carefully propelling herself back up to the bathroom.

Hopefully she would have time for a long, hot shower before dinner.

Roisin and Desdemona bluntly refused to attend the Quidditch match between Ravenclaw and Slytherin, fearing a repeat of the last match, and spent the time in the library, continuing their research on Animagi. Slytherin won, by a narrow margin, but Roisin had never paid much attention to Quidditch.

January slipped into February, with no change in the bitter weather. Parcels and packages containing potions ingredients arrived, and were stored in a disillusioned cabinet in Slytherin Head Boy's Room, (each house had a set of 'Head Boy/Girl rooms, but the female dorms were not an option).

The Third Years, began to spend most of their free time in the Slytherin potions lab, going over the different techniques of brewing that they would need when the time came to brew the potion. While admittedly tiring and time-consuming, Goyle had pointed out that at least they would fly through this year's Potions Exam. Millicent threw a wadded-up piece of parchment at him.

The Gryffindor-Ravenclaw match began to loom closer, which would normally be of little consequence, but this time would determine who Slytherin would be facing for the Quidditch Cup this year.

Professor McGonagall returned Harry's Firebolt, thankfully in good condition, which restored the Golden Trio for about half a day, when Hermione's cat supposedly ate Ron Weasley's pet rat, sparking another fight.

The tension was easy to spot, but the reason was surprisingly well-hidden. Roisin only found out when she was in the Library looking for a reference book on Charms and she heard the sound of someone trying not to cry. Following the noise, she came upon Hermione Granger.

Roisin hesitated for a moment. Despite Hermione being Harry's friend, she and Hermione had never been on the best of terms, at most passing acquaintances and academic rivals when it came to something that required creative thinking, one of the few things Hermione was bad at, but the girl sounded truly upset. Oh, well. "Hermione? What's wrong?"

The girl's head snapped up. She immediately looked down again, sniffing. "Go away. I don't want to talk to you, or anyone."

Trouble among the Golden Trio, then. Probably started by Weasley, as fairly usual. "What happened to split up the Golden Trio this time?"

Hermione looked up again. "What makes you so sure it has anything to do with Harry and Ron? It could just be me being emotional, or because someone called me a know-it-all."

Roisin raised an eyebrow. It was considered a slow day if someone didn't call Hermione a know-it-all, but this would be the first time that it had caused any kind of reaction. "Granger, you are one of the strongest and most tenacious people I know. Most of Hogwarts considers you an insufferable know-it-all, but you've never let it bother you. As far as I know, the only thing that gets you worked up like this is something to do with your friends."

Hermione scowled, but apparently decided that the best way to make Roisin leave her alone would be to just tell her what was wrong. "You know my cat, Crookshanks?" Roisin nodded. "Well, Ron found a few cat hairs on his sheets, spots of blood and his stupid rat missing. Now he thinks that Crookshanks ate Scabbers and isn't speaking to me, and Harry is siding with him!"

Roisin just nodded again. It sounded like Hermione needed someone to rant to. Hogwarts was like a soap opera at times, and at least one in every House in every year was eventually dubbed the 'Sympathetic Ear', regardless of whether or not they had the time or inclination to listen to you.

Still, it was a good way to raise your standing in your own house, keep track of what was going on in other houses and see who was in a position to be taken advantage of. Cue sympathetic comment and nudge. "Jumping to conclusions, aren't they? I mean, you can't be the only person in Hogwarts or even Gryffindor with a cat, and what would a girl's cat be doing in the boy's dorms?"

Hermione's lips curled into what looked suspiciously like a furious snarl. "Precisely! Ron's rat is useless anyway, and he's always complaining about it! You'd think he'd be glad for a chance to get a new pet! Then Harry comes along and says that all the evidence

points that way! I mean, I understand that it looks bad, but it would be nice if Harry could side with me over Ron once in a while.”

Roisin sighed, and here she had thought that Harry would have learned not to take sides in other people’s issues. Still, most of Hogwarts had witnessed that Hermione’s cat had it out for Ron’s rat. That was probably not what Hermione wanted to hear, however. “Last year all the evidence pointed to Harry as the Heir of Slytherin. I would think he’d learn not to jump to conclusions.”

Hermione nodded furiously. “Yes! But will they remember that? Of course not, it might prove them wrong! And I signed up for more than the usual two extra classes, and the work just keeps piling up and it’s just one thing on top of another and... and...”

Hermione burst into tears again. Roisin sat down next to her, placing a gentle arm around her shoulders. Maybe genuine sympathy was in order, after all, even if the two girls didn’t get along. Crabbe had a nervous breakdown over mounting schoolwork about once a year, and being a shoulder to ride out the storm of tears on wasn’t that unusual when you were around girls just entering puberty, who cried at the drop of a hat. Best to just make comforting noises and allow them to let it out.

Eventually, Hermione sat up again. “Sorry about that. I got your robes all wet.”

Roisin shrugged and performed a drying charm. “It’s all right. Are you sure that you don’t need anything else?”

Hermione shook her head, pulling out a handkerchief and drying her eyes as she began to re-pack her enormous book-bag. “No, thank you. I need to get back to the Common Room, so goodbye.”

Raising an eyebrow at the abrupt dismissal, Roisin found the book she had been looking for and headed for Madam Pince’s desk in order to check it out, before making her way back to her own Common Room. Urk, bloody homework.

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A/N: OK, this chapter is up and I'm working on the next one. Reviews and comments are very much appreciated and will cheer me up a lot. A moping Nat is a slow-writing Nat.

Anyway, you know the drill: take five seconds to tell me what you think.

Thanks, Nat.

Summery: See previous chapters.

Chapter Eleven

It was common knowledge that the Slytherin Trio of Draco, Greg and Vince were in desperate need of lessons in tact and discretion. Of Marcus Flint, however, Roisin had expected better. Still, most of Slytherin House had learned within a few months of the Trio's first year that Draco's plots tended to backfire spectacularly.

Therefore, whatever the Trio (currently aided by the Slytherin Quidditch Captain) was planning, and how or why it involved black cloaks, they didn't want to know and would do best to stay out of it.

Plausible Deniability was such a pleasant concept, after all, and Roisin had an Arithmancy Essay to finish if she was going to be dragged to the Ravenclaw vs. Gryffindor Quidditch Match tomorrow. Personally, Roisin would have preferred a lay-in, but since the match determined who faced Slytherin for the Quidditch Cup, the entire house was threatened with detention if they didn't show up.

Breakfast before the match was interesting in several ways. Luna was being ostracized by her House (again), so Roisin had invited her to eat at the Slytherin table, where she was currently involved in a lively debate with another Second Year, Rolf Scamander. Roisin felt sorry for Hagrid when he had those two in Care of Magical Creatures next year.

They seemed to be enjoying themselves, especially on the topic of evidence of Nargles, but everyone around them had lost track of the discussion at least half an hour ago.

All conversation came to a very abrupt halt as the Gryffindor Quidditch Team walked in and everyone caught sight of Harry's Firebolt. A full ten seconds later, chatter broke out again, and Roisin quietly sighed as she watched Draco head over to the Gryffindor table, probably to see if it was a real Firebolt.

It was, and Roisin quietly mourned the loss of any chance of sensible conversation not involving brooms or Quidditch at any point in the

near future. Giving it up as a loss, she tuned back to Luna and Rolf, who were now discussing if bowtruckles guarded trees with Broomstick-wood, or just Wand-wood.

At least she could be thankful for improved weather conditions while sitting through the Quidditch match, as it turned out to be a clear, cool day, rather than the downpour of the Hufflepuff vs. Gryffindor match. As far as actual playing was concerned, however, Roisin preferred Hufflepuff.

The Chasers, Keeper and Beater were average, but the Ravenclaw Seeker's mode of operation seemed to be following the other Seeker around and blocking them at random intervals. It was an interesting and unpredictable tactic, but offered very little in the way of entertainment or discernable strategy.

Roisin really needed to start being more careful what she wished for!

She had been mentally begging for something to liven up the game and contemplating whether or not she should just go back to the Common Room, when there was a loud scream from the Ravenclaw Seeker.

Everyone, even the other Quidditch players, stopped what they were doing to see what she was pointing at. Roisin's breath caught in her throat; three tall, hooded Dementors stood in the middle of the pitch. The spectators instantly went into a panic, and Roisin nearly joined them, until she noticed the distinct lack of cold and horrific memories.

The reason for that was swiftly discovered when Harry shot a Patronus Charm at the three Dementors, and an enormous, silvery-white stag shot out of his wand, lowered its antlers, and charged. Roisin didn't have a clear view from her position in the stands, but she was fairly sure that Dementors didn't trip over their own robes and fall into a tangle of black cloth and struggling bodies.

Before Roisin could cast a vision charm to get a closer look, a tremendous cheer announced that someone had caught the snitch, and Roisin allowed herself to be swept up in the crowd as they flowed down to the pitch. Forcing a path away from where the Quidditch

teams had landed, Roisin moved to where Professor McGonagall was facing down the 'Dementors'.

Roisin stalked through the Common Room in a towering fury, followed at a relatively safe distance by Goyle, Crabbe and Draco. "Come on, Roisin, it was just a joke!"

Roisin rounded on him, her eyes narrowed, causing all bystanders to scramble away as she practically hissed in fury. "A joke? After you've spent all of the school year thus far taunting my cousin about his reaction to Dementors, you think it's a joke to dress up as them, just to disrupt a Quidditch match? If that isn't one of the most infantile..."

She was cut off by Draco's indignation overcoming his common sense. "Infantile? Roisin, you're blowing this way out of proportion!"

That was the wrong thing to say, and resulted in the outraged girl drawing her wand in an eye blink. Draco hid behind Crabbe, who took one look at Roisin's face and quickly moved out of the line of fire. Giving up on trying to calm herself, Roisin exploded. "Blowing it out of proportion! Blow this out of proportion, you irritating little ponce! Punctum Maxima!"

The hex she threw at him was a specially modified version of the stinging hex, with the victim being chased by numerous dots of light with the basic effect of being attacked by a swarm of bees. Ignoring the three boys' protests as they tried to reverse it, Roisin spun on her heel and swept out of the common room, making her way to Gryffindor tower. She needed to calm down before she hit her housemates with something worse, and she might as well congratulate Harry while she was at it.

Mary had joined her twin, Seamus, and several other first- and second-years, all of whom were well on their way to a sugar high by the time Roisin made it into the Gryffindor Common Room.

Sensibly avoiding that area, she fought her way over to where Harry was standing, giving him a congratulatory hug before being dragged off by Parvati and Lavender, who wanted details on the 'Dementor Stunt' that Roisin's housemates had pulled. Deciding that the rumour

mill was as good a way to get back at them as any, Roisin told them everything she knew about it.

Roughly an hour into the party, Roisin had joined a slightly inebriated Katie Bell in 'People Watching'. Giggling as they watched a girl that Katie pointed out as 'Patricia Stimpson' trying to flirt with the Weasley Twins and constantly getting them mixed up, Roisin spotted Hermione at a side table, surrounded by books and oblivious to the chaos around her.

Thinking that Hermione probably didn't want to be disturbed, but really shouldn't be sitting out a party, Roisin spent several minutes trying to coax the bookworm away from her schoolwork, before finally throwing up her hands as Harry approached. Maybe he would have better luck.

It was a good thing that Professor Snape never actually checked that his Slytherins were all in their beds, as the Gryffindor Victory party went on well into the night. In fact, it didn't even slow down until one in the morning, when Roisin was forced to dive behind a large armchair to avoid being spotted by Professor McGonagall, who showed up and ordered them all to bed.

Not wanting to risk being caught out of bed, Roisin accepted Parvati's offer of using one of the spare beds in the Third-Year Girls Dorm, dragging Mary up with her. Casting an alarm spell to wake her up in time to sneak back to Slytherin before anyone was up and about, Roisin fell asleep almost instantly.

Roisin seldom had dreams, and tonight was no different, so the next thing she was aware of was falling off the bed with a crash as a loud and piercing scream echoed through the tower.

Hearing several other exclamations as the other girls in the room woke up; Roisin threw on someone's spare robe, grabbed her wand, and made a dash for the common room to see what the fuss was about.

She wasn't the only one, as she reached the Common Room, still littered with rubbish from the victory party, just as the Third-Year boys

tumbled down their stairs, all looking panicked. Rubbing sleep out of her eyes, Roisin tried to focus on Harry. “What in Merlin’s sweet name...?”

Before they could answer, other Gryffindor students began poking their sleep-tussled heads out of various dorm rooms, demanding to know the same thing. “Who shouted?”

“What are you doing?”

The Third-Year boys ignored them, concentrating on Ron Weasley. “Are you sure you weren’t dreaming, Ron?”

“I’m telling you, I saw him!”

Mary staggered down the stairs, followed by Parvati, Lavender and Hermione, and leaned against Roisin. Wrapping an arm around her younger cousin, Roisin stifled a yawn. “Wake the whole tower, why don’t you. Saw who?”

Other students were coming down, now, in various states of wakefulness. “What’s all the noise?”

“Professor McGonagall told us to go to bed.”

The Weasley Twins bounced down the stairs, un-naturally awake for the time of night. “Excellent, are we carrying on?”

They were followed by their older brother, who was hurriedly pinning his Head Boy badge onto his pajamas as he spoke. “Everyone back upstairs!”

Thankfully, this prompted an actual answer, albeit in a very faint tone. “Perce – Sirius Black! In our dormitory! With a knife! Woke me up.”

Everyone froze and a heavy silence dropped. Percy looked startled and a little pale. “Nonsense! You had too much to eat, Ron – had a nightmare - ,”

“I’m telling you – “

“Now, really, enough is enough!”

Professor McGonagall was back, and Roisin hastily ducked behind Parvati, pulling Mary with her. The professor slammed the portrait behind her as she entered the Common Room and stared furiously around. “I’m delighted that Gryffindor won the match, but this is getting ridiculous! Percy, I expected better of you.”

The Head Boy looked more upset about being called into question than he did about the possible attack on his sibling. “I certainly did not authorize this, Professor! My brother Ron here had a nightmare, and –“

He was interrupted by the brother in question. “IT WASN’T A NIGHTMARE! PROFESSOR, I WOKE UP, AND SIRIUS BLACK WAS STANDING OVER ME, HOLDING A KNIFE!”

Professor McGonagall looked startled and stared at him. “Don’t be ridiculous, Weasley, how could he have gotten through the portrait?”

Ron was clearly nearing Hysteria as he pointed a shaking finger toward the portrait of Sir Cadogan. “Ask him! Ask him if he saw someone!”

Still glaring suspiciously, Professor McGonagall opened the portrait again and went outside. Seamus had joined his twin, and Roisin wrapped her arms tighter around them both as everyone held their breath and waited.

“Sir Cadogan, did you just allow a man entrance to Gryffindor Tower?”

The mildly psychotic knight sounded almost triumphant. “Certainly, dear lady!”

There was a stunned silence, both in and outside the Common Room. Professor McGonagall looked no less shocked. “You – you did? But – but the password!”

Sir Cadogan still sounded cheerful, as though he hadn’t just let a murderous lunatic into a tower full of mostly defenseless children. “He had them! He had the whole week’s, my lady. Read them off a little piece of paper!”

Professor McGonagall’s face was as white as a marble statue, and nearly as cold with fury as she re-entered the room. “Which person – which abysmally foolish person – wrote down this week’s passwords and left them lying around?”

For a moment, Roisin wasn’t sure if anyone would answer. Self-Preservation suggested remaining silent, but Gryffindors were not known for self-preservation, and not knowing who was responsible – and making sure that they didn’t do it again – could turn out to be even worse for communal safety. There was a long silence, finally broken by a high-pitched squeak as Neville Longbottom slowly raised a trembling hand into the air.

Unseen – not that anyone would be paying attention anyway – at the back of the room, Roisin closed her eyes. Even without the attempted mass-murder, this was not going to be at all pretty.

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A/N: Yes, yes, yes, I know that it’s been far too long since I last updated this. Unfortunately, my computer crashed, taking all of my word documents with it. That meant that I had to re-write almost everything, including my resume, cover letter, Original Writing, Miscellaneous Crap, and at least 186 fan fiction documents, not to mention several half-written ones.

So re-writing and backing up my files, along with several other stories and writers-block, is responsible for the four-month delay.

Incidentally, I have my first serious Harry Potter crossover going on, so if anyone would like to tell me how it's going, that would be much appreciated.

As always, Reviews are inspiring, Constructive Criticism is welcome and Flames are laughed at. Take five seconds (or more, if you like) to tell me what you think.

Thanks, Nat.

